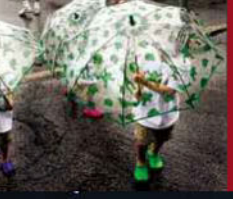

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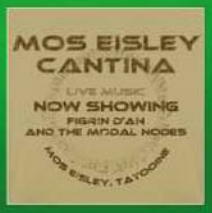

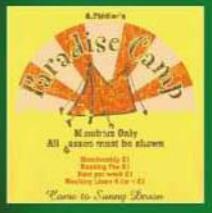

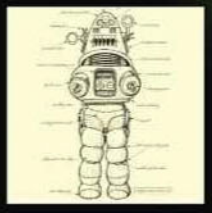

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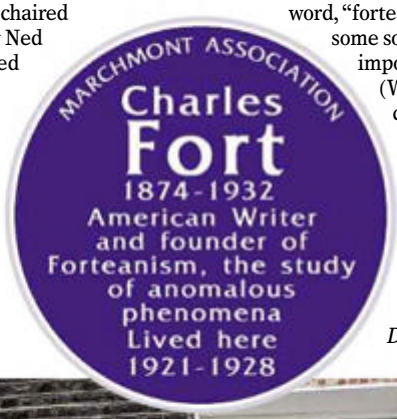
editorial

Commemorating Charles Fort

The new plaque commemorating Charles Fort's seven-year sojourn in London was unveiled at 39 Marchmont Street in Bloomsbury, northwest London, on 28 March 2015 by Lazzaro Pietragnoli, Mayor of Camden, and Paul Sieveking, founding co-editor of *Fortean Times*. Scott Wood, co-organiser of the London Fortean Society, read the opening passage of *The Book of the Damned* and Paul added a few comments about Fort's view of the world.

The new plaque, replacing one made for *FT* and installed in 1997 (see **FT101:4**), resembles the famous blue plaques put up round London since 1866, and now organised by English Heritage. It was commissioned by the Marchmont Association (chaired by Ricci de Freitas), made by Ned Heywood, and largely financed by Brij Parmar, owner/proprietor of Bloomsbury Building Supplies, which now occupies 39 Marchmont Street (see **FT293:42-45** for a possible haunting of the premises).



Marchmont Street has been home to some interesting residents over the years, as other plaques commemorate: Emlyn Williams, actor and playwright (at number 60); Sir William Empson, poet & literary critic (at 65), Kenneth Williams, comedian (at 57); and Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley (who lived in a house replaced by number 87). Other plaques erected by the Marchmont Association in adjacent streets commemorate VI Lenin, Jerome K Jerome, Roger Fry, and Alexander Herzen's Free Russian Press – not forgetting Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park, the notorious Victorian cross-dressers known as "Stella and Fanny" (see **FT306:74-76** for their story).

Charles and Anna Fort rented Flat A above a greengrocer's at 39 Marchmont Street, to be close to the British Museum. Charles's routine was to rise at eight, work on his notes till Anna made lunch, then at two o'clock walk to the reading room in the British Museum to pursue his "grand tour" of scientific periodicals, returning home at five. After supper, four or five times a week, he would take Anna to the pictures; other evenings they went to Hyde Park where Charles would sometimes make speeches about the prospects of space travel. According to Anna, during their walks Charles would stand on the street, staring up at the night sky, pointing out constellations or planets. He explained the history behind them, the ancient mysteries, or the recent discoveries. "Then up in our rooms he would throw open the windows and stand gazing at the stars," she later told Theodore Dreiser. "That was his delight for a long, long time."

We suspect Fort would have been uncomfortable with the plaque's epithet "founder of forteanism", as he had refused to join the Fortean Society when it was founded in 1931. While it's hard to think of a more apposite word, "forteanism" can't help but imply some sort of ideology, a straitjacket imposed on the flux of existence. (We're also puzzled by the capitalisation of the words "Writer" and "Lived" on the plaque, but anyone who has ever picked up one of Fort's books will know his own use of capitals was no less eccentric, so we'll let that go).

Reviewing *The Book of the Damned* in 1919, Ben Hecht said that Fort "has made a terrible onslaught upon the accumulated lunacy of fifty centuries." To be a fortean isn't to embrace any fixed ideology but to empathise with the fecund and wayward spirit of the man who wrote: "If our existence is an organism, in which all phenomena are continuous, dreams cannot be utterly different, in the view of continuity, from occurrences that are said to be real."

DAVID R SUTTON

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Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
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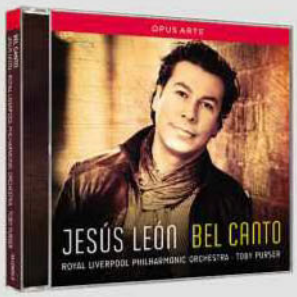

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Never gonna give you up...

Extreme hoarder mummifies her mummy, while Christians keep dead dad in hope of resurrection

• On 4 April, the mummified body of an elderly woman wrapped in a carpet was removed from a house on San Francisco's Fourth Avenue. Three days earlier, city workers had been unable to enter the building because there was so much rubbish inside, reaching to the ceiling in some rooms, so that had to call in firefighters with oxygen masks. The property – with seven bedrooms and two bathrooms – was crawling with rats, black widow spiders, dog fæces and 300 bottles of urine, and it took many hours to find the body. For a decade, neighbours assumed the building was unoccupied. "There were these tattered curtains covering the windows and there were never any lights on," said one. "I always thought it was either abandoned or haunted or both."

The dead woman was Anna Ragin, 90, who lived with her 65-year-old daughter Carolyn, a retired Pacific Bell worker. Neighbours said the mother had not been seen for at least seven years. Her husband, Archibald Ragin, once lived at the property, but died 15 years ago at the age of 101. After her mother's body was removed from the house, Carolyn was taken to hospital to be mentally assessed. Just a week after removing all the rubbish, estate agents valued the 1904 Bay Area property at $2.5 million. *San Francisco Chronicle, 5 April; ibtimes.com, 6 April; dailymail.co.uk, 11+12 April 2015.*

• Peter Wald, 52, who suffered from diabetes, got a leg infection sometime in March 2013. He refused to go to hospital, trusting God to cure him. Eventually he slipped into a coma and died sometime around 20 March at his home in Hamilton, Ontario. His wife Kaling Wald, 50, left him in bed and after noticing his stomach bloating and signs of rigor mortis on his forehead, she locked the bedroom. She sealed the door and the vents with duct tape to prevent the stench of decomposition from disturbing the busy household, which included five of the couple's six children, aged between 11 and 22, and seven adult friends. Mrs Wald trusted God would resurrect her husband from the dead, and it seems her family shared this belief. Next-door neighbour Brenda Dennis said hordes of flies could be seen around a second-floor window and birds were pecking at the screen. Family members wearing black robes were observed dancing and chanting in the back yard, sometimes twice a day.

ABOVE: The San Francisco house where Mrs Ragin's mummified corpse was found.
RIGHT: The Wald family's blue van, covered in Christian messages and crosses.

The house was crawling with rats and black widow spiders

Six months later, on 17 September, the local sheriff discovered the corpse when he arrived to evict the family for defaulting on the mortgage. It had attracted rodents and was so badly decomposed that it could not be identified from a photograph. The family had packed Mr Wald's things in preparation for the eviction and did not attempt to conceal his body. On 1 December 2014, Mrs Wald, 50, pleaded guilty to failing to notify police that her husband had died. She was sentenced to 18 months probation and ordered to seek counselling.

The Walds were recognised in their neighbourhood for their blue van covered in messages of love for God and crosses carved into the headlights. They formed a kind of evangelistic community, distributing tracts and food for the homeless. The family has since moved to Fort Erie, Ontario. Mrs Wald said her faith was not shaken and she still expected her husband to come back from the dead in due time. Hope springs eternal.

Following Mrs Wald's sentencing, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) showed its customary sensitivity by negotiating with Hamilton-area advertisers to erect a billboard that proclaimed: "Are There Corpses In Your Home? Time To Go Vegan". *CBC News, 17 Jan; [R] Hamilton (Ont.) Spectator, Chicago Tribune, 2 Dec; Victoria (BC) Times-Colonist, Church Times, 5 Dec 2014.*

• A South Korean woman was found living with the embalmed body of her husband seven years after he had died. The 47-year-old, identified only as Cho, had used her pharmaceutical training to embalm the body in their Seoul apartment after his death in 2007. The body showed little sign of decomposition. "It was fairly clean and maintained well," said an official. "We don't know how it was possible." Cho was not arrested. *MX News (Sydney), 13 Feb 2014.*

For recent round-ups of kept corpses, see **FT278:26-27** and **FT310:8-9**.

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THE GERBILS OF DOOM
Did these popular pets really spread the Black Death across Europe?
PAGE 8

DEAD AS A DODO?
Long extinct bird returns to become a YouTube star
PAGE 23

JAPAN SAYS NO TO UFOs
Military flyers report complete lack of close encounters
PAGE 28

The Conspirasphere

Has President Putin died and been replaced by a clone? Is the establishment hiding evidence of giant Egyptians? NOEL ROONEY examines the 'evidence'.

Vlad the Imposter, no less. The Internet was very busy when President Putin evidently wasn't; his absence from the international stage for 10 days recently sent all sorts of media into a spin (a versatile little word, that). The mainstream concentrated on subliminal death wishes for the heartily disliked (unless you're Russian, or well off or moderately nationalist) leader, asking if he was, God forbid, ill; the conspiracy pole of the press continuum went for something a little more exotic, but in keeping with recent memes (think the Beatles were all dead men's doubles).

Caliber Hitter, who has a track record of unmasking dead people who are still alive, produced what he modestly called PROOF that Mr Putin had died and been replaced by a body double. The PROOF consisted of a series of photographs PROVING that Putin was not the man we thought he was. Intriguingly, there was more than enough photographic evidence to show that Putin had died several times, and been replaced by a series of increasingly unphotogenic clones. One very ancient picture showed a young naval recruit with a pimple under his nose; apparently some over-zealous Soviet surgeon saw the pimple and decided to remove the man.

The revelation that Putin was not only dead, but had indulged in serial reincarnation, got all sorts of people excited. The whole pantheon of undead (Bill Hicks, the Beatles, more or less any Hollywood star who has ever taken a holiday) was trotted out on various websites. It also reminded this writer that the position of photographic evidence in the conspiracy world is a decidedly two-edged thing: on the one hand, most if not all photographs produced by the Establishment to prove, say, that men landed on the Moon, are immediately subject to intense, and often intensely silly, scrutiny by people who see through the fakery of it all; on the other hand, when an amiably preposterous story like this one pops up, it's almost always the photographic evidence that PROVES the case. And in this case, just as with the implausibly dead Paul McCartney, the ears have it.

Talking of evidence, Apollo Belenus – described on its website as the paranormal editor of 'Before It's News' (I wonder what he eats?) – has come up with some lovely reasons why the ancient Egyptian Pyramids were in fact (a lovely word, that) built by giants. His evidence includes the fact that in much ancient Egyptian iconography, some figures are MUCH bigger than all the others. Gods, for instance, are often bigger than mere mortals, and pharaohs are regularly depicted as large figures beating down pygmy enemies. Mr Belenus goes on to ask the obvious (well, obvious if you are Mr Belenus) questions: why are the world's governments hiding this evidence from us? And if they are hiding this from us, what else are they hiding? Cue a shopping list of conspiracy theory staples, ending up with Darwin's theory of evolution (a government plot if ever there was one) – the point being that human giants were never part of Darwin's theory, 'They' didn't tell us about the giant Egyptians (apart from the odd exhibition of Egyptian iconography attended by thousands), ergo 'They' invented Darwin's theory. And yes, there are photographs. *http://beforeitsnews.com/paranormal/2012/08/giants-build-the-ancient-pyramids-of-egypt-evidence-found-2442446.html*

http://beforeitsnews.com/conspiracy-theories/2015/03/proof-putin-is-dead-double-was-used-on-march-16th-real-putin-whacked-via-coup-detat-2468748.html

LEFT: Would the real President Putin really hug a koala?

ANDREW TAYLOR / G20 AUSTRALIA VIA GETTY IMAGES

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EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Monkey 'prostituted'

Jersey Eve. Post, 1 Aug 2014.

Pastor Claims Gay People Are Possessed By "Fart Demons" That Can Drive Pigs To Suicide

queerty.com, 23 July 2014.

Battle to remove alien species from riverbanks

Kentish Express, 24 July 2014.

Wasps in drink rage

Sun, 21 July 2014.

Wear shorts to help kids with heart conditions

Hull Daily Mail, 28 July 2014.

The man on the Clapham omnibus does not give evidence

Times, 7 Aug 2014.

Mermaids seen in Woodhall Spa

Lincolnshire Echo, 24 July 2014.

Fort's Mad Fishmonger strikes

Catfish weighing 6,800kg (1,070 stone) were scattered across a road in Kaili, Guizhou province, China, on 17 March 2015 when the doors of a truck opened without warning. With the help of fire crews and local people the catfish were loaded onto the vehicle again. **PHOTO: CHINAFOTOPRESS/GETTY IMAGES**.

A similar spill took place on Ravenhill Road, Belfast, on 24 January, when a fish tanker came to an abrupt halt at a traffic light junction. On this occasion, local residents made the most of the fishy windfall, gathering hundreds of mackerel in plastic bags. **PHOTOS: CHARLES MCQUILLAN/GETTY IMAGES**.

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SIDELINES...

APPROPRIATE JOURNALISTS

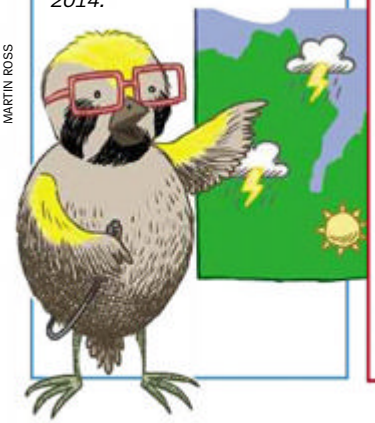
For weather reporters, North Carolina has Larry Sprinkle and New York has Amy Freeze, while the BBC's *East Midlands Today* has Sara Blizzard. A sex scandal at the Vienna Boys' Choir in 2010 was reported for the *Times* by Roger Boyes, while Boko Haram's kidnap of schoolgirls in Nigeria in April 2014 was covered for the BBC by Nick Childs. *MX (Sydney), –Oct 2014.*

SIXTY YEARS LEFT

Generating 3cm (1.2in) of topsoil takes 1,000 years, and if current rates of degradation continue all of the world's topsoil will be gone within 60 years, according to Maria-Helena Semedo of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). About a third has already been degraded; causes include chemical-heavy farming techniques, deforestation that increases erosion, and global warming. *[R] Scientific American, 8 Dec 2014.*

SENSITIVE BIRDS

Songbirds may be able to sense storms approaching hundreds of miles away. Tracking data has revealed that five golden-winged warblers left their nesting site in the Appalachians in Pennsylvania and flew 400 miles (650km) south to the Gulf of Mexico one or two days before devastating storms swept across the continent on 27 April 2014, killing 35. By 2 May, all five warblers had returned. Experts believe they were attuned to the infrasound (deep rumble) of the tornadoes. *Current Biology, Dec; BBC News, D.Mail, 20 Dec 2014.*



MARTIN ROSS

MEDICAL BAG

NEW RODENT SUSPECTS IN SPREAD OF BUBONIC PLAGUE, PLUS ANGLO-SAXON COW BILE BEATS MODERN SUPERBUG

THE GERBILS OF DEATH

Gerbils rather than rats may have been to blame for numerous outbreaks of bubonic plague across Europe. The Black Death arrived in Europe in 1346/7 and caused the second *Yersinia pestis* pandemic, one of the deadliest in human history (the first pandemic hit Europe in AD 543 – see "A plague on us", **FT319:23**). Over the next 400 years, epidemics broke out repeatedly, killing millions of people. It had long been thought that black rats (*Rattus rattus*) were responsible for allowing the plague to establish in Europe, with new outbreaks occurring when fleas jumped from infected rodents to humans.

However, Prof Nils Christian Stenseth, from the University of Oslo, and his colleagues – writing in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* – do not think a rat reservoir was to blame. The team analysed 4,119 historical records of post-1340s plague outbreaks and found that the vast majority were probably caused by similar outbreaks nearby; but they were able to identify 61 outbreaks that took place in 17 harbour areas, including London, Hamburg, Barcelona and Dubrovnik, that were likely to have been caused by maritime imports from Asia. By comparing these cases with historical records, the team was able to identify 16 years between 1346 and 1837 in which brand new introductions of *Y. pestis* are likely to have been responsible for plague outbreaks, as opposed to infection from neighbouring regions or local trade partners.

When they compared the dates of these outbreaks with tree ring data, they found no correlation with European climate patterns. However, climate fluctuations in Asia – above average temperatures followed by sudden drops – consistently preceded plague reintroductions in Europe by around 15 years. In other words, the new plague outbreaks were linked to Asian rodents, not rats living in Europe, as had been thought. "Warmer climate increases the activity of fleas and their ability to spread the bacterium from individual to individual," says Stenseth. "We have previously shown that an increase of one degree Celsius doubles the prevalence [of plague] in wild rodents in central Asia." Under such conditions, not only do the fleas become more active, but the rodents they live on – most likely giant gerbils and marmots – become more numerous. When the temperature suddenly falls again, as indicated by a change in the thickness of tree rings, rodent populations crash, and their fleas are forced to find new hosts – perhaps camels, perhaps humans.

"The study is interesting and convincing," says Hartmut Dunkelberg of the University of Göttingen in Germany. "Climate influences different factors such as the development of fleas and the distribution of plague reservoirs. Many human infections are seasonal." Stenseth's team believe the 15-year time lag between such crashes and the introduction of new plague-ridden fleas to Europe comprised three stages: a couple of years finding new hosts and coming into contact with humans, around 10 years travelling westward along trade routes such as the Silk Road, and finally the plague's reintroduction to Europe via marine trading harbours.

The long, middle stage across central Asia may have involved camels, says Stenseth, which could have caught fleas from gerbils and passed them on to humans. This explanation for the provenance of fresh European plague outbreaks explains how countries like Norway, which had no rat populations at the time, could have suffered repeated outbreaks. Today, climate fluctuations are likely to affect wildlife plague reservoirs in different ways, depending on their location, says Stenseth. "In central Asia and northern China, the current climate change is likely to increase the occurrence of plague, whereas in the southern part of China it is likely to decrease."

Stenseth's team now plans to analyse plague bacteria DNA taken from ancient skeletons across Europe. If the genetic material shows a large amount of variation, it would suggest their theory is correct. Different waves of the plague coming from Asia would show more differences than a strain that emerged from a rat reservoir.

While the plague died out in Europe after the 19th century, outbreaks continue in other parts of the world. The World Health Organization said there were nearly 800 cases reported worldwide in 2013, including 126 deaths. In another paper, published in the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene,* US researchers said that the expansion of agriculture was placing East Africa at an increased risk of the plague. As cropland increased, rodent populations were

H ZELL

ABOVE: Could the Black Death have been spread by Mongolian gerbils like these?

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also rising, creating "the perfect storm for plague transmission", the researchers said. *newscientist.com, 23 Feb; BBC News, 24 Feb 2015.*

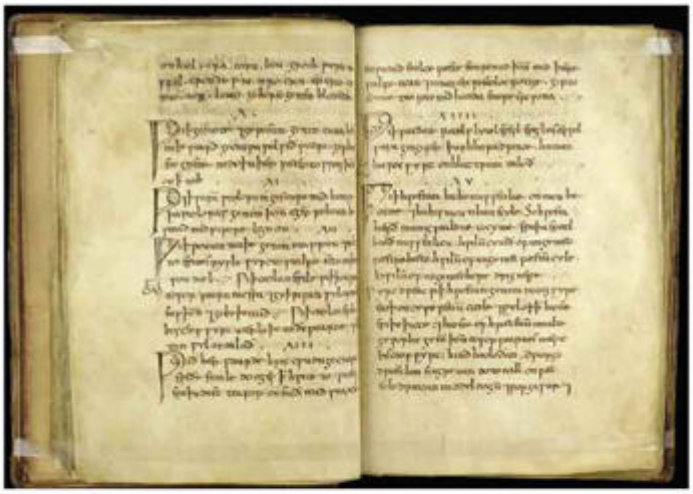
Bubonic plague first appeared in Madagascar in 1898; in 2012, about 60 people died of it, and another outbreak began in late August 2013. By late November it had killed 40 people and infected 79 others. The authorities try and control it with insecticide, but fleas have developed a high resistance to the leading brand. If diagnosed early, bubonic plague can be treated with antibiotics; but two per cent of the cases in Madagascar are the more dangerous pneumonic form of the disease, which can be spread person-to-person by coughing. Inmates in Madagascar's rat-infested jails are particularly at risk. *[R] BBC News, 22 Nov 2014.*

COW BILE TO THE RESCUE

A 1,000-year-old remedy for styes (infected eyelash follicles), discovered in a unique British Library manuscript has been found to kill the superbug MRSA, scourge of modern hospitals. Two Nottingham University academics – Dr Christina Lee, an Anglo-Saxon specialist, and Freya Harrison, a microbiologist – recreated the potion from the 10th century *Bald's Leechbook*, an Anglo-Saxon medical guide, to see if it really worked.

The "eyesalve" recipe calls for two species of allium (garlic and leek), wine and oxgall (bile from a cow's stomach). It describes a very specific method of making the solution, including the use of a brass vessel to brew it, a strainer to purify it and an instruction to leave the mixture for nine days before use.

Sourcing authentic ingredients was a major challenge, said Harrison. They had to hope for the best with the leeks and garlic because modern crop varieties are likely to be quite different from ancient ones. For the wine they used an organic vintage from a historic English vineyard. As "brass vessels" would be hard to sterilise – and expensive – they used glass bottles with squares of brass sheet immersed in the mixture. Oxgall was easy, though, as cow's bile salts are sold as a supplement for people who have had their gall bladders removed.



ABOVE: *Bald's Leechbook*, the 10th-century tome that yielded the unusual remedy.

"It turned into a kind of loathsome, odorous slime"

After nine days of stewing, the potion had killed all the soil bacteria introduced by the leek and garlic. "It was self-sterilising," said Harrison. "That was the first inkling that this crazy idea just might have some use." A side effect was that it made the lab smell of garlic. "It was not unpleasant," said Harrison. "It's all edible stuff. Everyone thought we were making lunch." The potion was tested on scraps of skin taken from mice infected with methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. This is an antibiotic-resistant version of the bacteria that cause styes, more commonly known as the hospital superbug MRSA. The potion killed 90 per cent of the bacteria. Vancomycin, the antibiotic generally used for MRSA, killed about the same proportion when it was added to the skin scraps.

Unexpectedly, the ingredients had little effect unless they were all brought together. "The big challenge is trying to find out why that combination works," said Steve Diggle, another of the researchers. Do the components work in synergy or do they trigger the formation of new potent compounds? Using exactly the right method also seems to be crucial, said Harrison, as another group tried to recreate the remedy in 2005 and found that their potion failed to kill bacteria grown in a dish. "With the nine-day waiting period, the preparation turned into a kind of loathsome, odorous slime," said Michael Drout of Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts. If the 10th century recipe does lead to new drugs, they might be useful against MRSA skin infections such as those that cause foot ulcers in people with diabetes. "These are usually antibiotic-resistant," said Diggle. However, he doesn't recommend people try this at home.

Harrison presented the research at the Society for General Microbiology conference in Birmingham at the end of March. It wouldn't be the first modern drug to be derived from ancient manuscripts – the widely used antimalarial drug artemisinin, which has saved millions of lives, was discovered not so long ago by a Chinese pharmacologist called Tu Youyou scouring historical Chinese medical texts.

Bald's Leechbook takes its name from a Latin verse colophon at the end of the second book that begins: *Bald habet hund [hunc] libru[m] Cild que[m] conscribere iussit* ("Bald owns this book which he ordered Cild to write/compile.") It was possibly compiled under the influence of Alfred the Great's educational reforms, and includes the only plastic surgery mentioned in Anglo-Saxon records. *New Scientist, 30 Mar; D.Telegraph, 31 Mar 2015.*

SIDELINES...

BUZZ OFF

When a bus stopped to let male passengers relieve themselves in Quang Ngai province, Vietnam, one of them urinated on a beehive as a 'joke'. The infuriated bees stung 22 passengers on their genitalia, hands and faces and followed the group back on the bus to continue the attack. Three men were hospitalised with swellings and fever. *Metro, 4 Mar 2015.*

HEAD BURIED

The head of Fritz Haarmann, the notorious German serial killer known as the "Butcher of Hanover", has been cremated after being kept in formalin in the University of Göttingen's medical department for the last 89 years. Haarmann was guillotined in 1925 for the murder of at least 24 young men between 1918 and 1924, and served as one of the inspirations for Fritz Lang's 1931 thriller *M. [AP] 25 Jan 2015.*

MACABRE GAME

Vasiliy Starovoytov, 55, from Baltiysek, Russia, caught his son Roman, eight, using a human skull as a football. He confiscated the skull and called police, who speculated that it belonged to a World War II soldier. "Roman said the man was dead," said his father, "so [kicking it around] wasn't doing any harm." *Metro, 16 Mar 2015.*

ROSS

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SIDELINES...

MAD HONEY

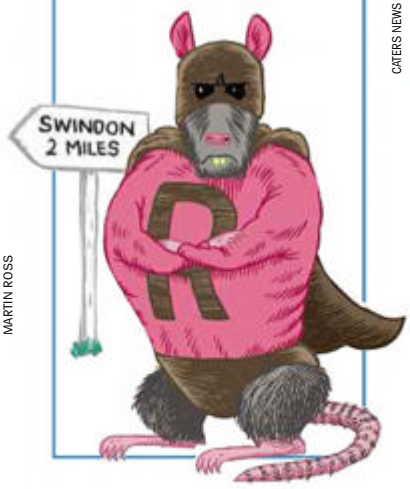
Dark red, bitter *deli bal* ('mad honey') from northern Turkey contains grayanotoxin (from rhododendron nectar), which can induce light-headedness, blurred vision and impaired speech. Eating a lot can be fatal. In the 18th century *deli bal* was infused in drinks across Europe to enhance the intoxication. Locals still use it to treat hypertension and stomach ailments, and boost sexual performance. *D.Mail, 14 Oct 2014.*

CAT ASSASSINS

An extremely rare butterfly – a continental swallowtail – was spotted in a West Sussex garden in June before being eaten by Poppy, a local cat. And in September a rare wryneck survived an arduous 3,000-mile (4,830km) flight from Africa, only to be mauled by a cat in Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, while foraging for ants. The bird was rushed to a rescue centre, but died five days later. *Sun, 12 June, 6 Sept; D.Mirror, 6 Sept 2014.*

SUPER-RATS

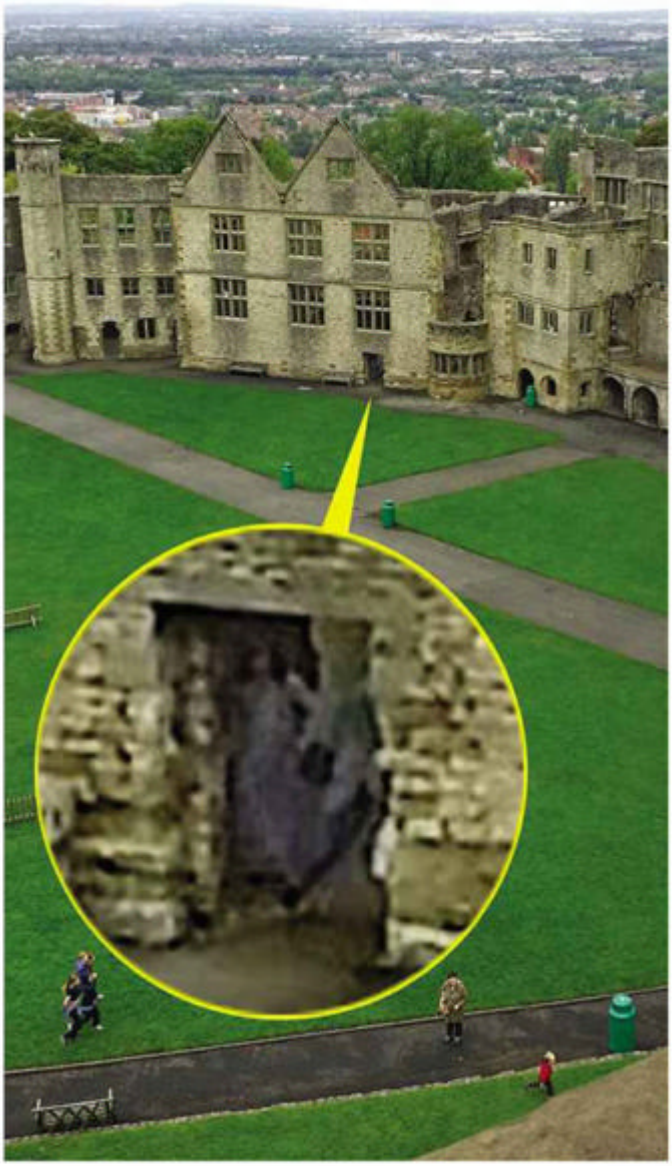
An army of super-rats, 20in (50cm) from nose to tail and immune to traditional poisons, is heading for Swindon in Wiltshire. A large number have already been recorded in the county. In Gloucestershire and Shropshire, one in five rats tested was immune to poison, rising to three-quarters in Southampton and Bristol. Super-rats were first spotted in Bradford in 2010. *D.Mirror, D.Mail, 7 Feb 2015*.



MARTIN ROSS

Grey Lady of Dudley?

A rival to Hampton Court's spook is caught on camera



CATERS NEWS AGENCY

Has Amy Harper photographed the fabled Grey Lady of Dudley Castle? Mrs Harper, 28, took several pictures on her Samsung Galaxy camera phone while visiting the castle in the West Midlands on 30 August 2014 with her husband Dean and their three children. It wasn't until she was back home in Birmingham and zoomed in on a picture taken from the castle tower, of Sharington Range, a ruined Tudor building in the grounds, that she saw a reddish glow in a top window, and standing inside the arch at ground level the hazy image of a woman in grey, possibly with a smaller figure beside her.

"It is really creepy," said Mrs Harper. "Dean had heard about the ghost of the Grey Lady and we think it must be her." The photo sparked speculation on social media that it was either the result of clever editing or had been achieved by using a special ghost app; but Mrs Harper said, "I wouldn't have a clue where to start." Barri Ghai, lead investigator at the Ghostfinder Paranormal Society, said the figure is "too vague and grainy" to be a hoax and suggested it was merely the simulacrum of a figure caused by inanimate shapes and shadows. Nick Duffy, Chairman of West Midlands Ghost Club, said the photo was "too good to be true". As no one seems to have suggested that it might just be a *real person*, the Gang of Fort presumes there is a good reason for ruling out such a mundane notion.

Dudley Castle, initially built as a wooden structure in about 1070, has been regarded as one of the most haunted places in the UK. The Grey Lady is said to be the ghost of Dorothy Beaumont, wife of the castle's Royalist second-in-command during the Civil War. She gave birth to a daughter who died after only a few months. Mad with grief, she herself died several months later during the seizure of the castle by Roundheads in 1646. She was denied her dying wish to be buried next to her daughter and is said to have haunted the place ever since, appearing to search for the child. She is most commonly spotted in the castle keep and in a pub in the castle grounds, The Grey Lady Tavern, where, in the words of one ghost-hunting website, "there have been many reports of unexplained sounds, alarms going off in the middle of the night without explanation and extreme drops in temperature." Other ghosts reputed to roam the castle include the Brown Maiden, the Green Man, a Mad Monk and a Drummer Boy. (They sound like spooks from Central Casting.) *birminghammail.co.uk, independent.co.uk, 7 Oct; D.Mail, 8+9 Oct 2014.*

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Essex's dead ringers

Doppelgängers with remarkably similar lives are now pals

EASTNEWS PRESS AGENCY

ABOVE: Neil Richardson (left) with his doppelgänger John Jemison (right).

When retired Anglican clergyman Neil Richardson, 69, moved to Braintree, Essex, in September 2013, he was constantly greeted by strangers who called him John. On one occasion he was in the Quadrant Café when the manager greeted him with the words, 'Hello John' and refused to believe he was someone else until he produced his driving licence.

Mr Richardson finally met his doppelgänger – John Jemison, 74, a retired head teacher, who lives less than a mile away. The pair came face to face in March this year when they boarded the same coach for a Friends of Braintree Museum visit to the Magna Carta exhibition at the British Library. Mr Jemison said: "I didn't instantly notice our resemblance but as I boarded the bus, Neil greeted me with 'Are you John Jemison?' I was distracted with the thought, 'Oh dear, it's someone else who wants me to do something.' My wife, however, did a double-take and we began to look forward to the opportunity to meet at the end of our journey."

As well as looking alike, the two men have lived remarkably similar lives. Both studied at the College of St Mark and St John in Chelsea in the Sixties, but never met and went on to become religious knowledge teachers. Both men married their sweethearts in the Sixties soon after meeting them. Mr Jemison taught at Braintree's Alec Hunter and John Bunyan schools, before becoming head of Silver End Primary School, while Mr Richardson became a rector. They both enjoy singing and have a keen interest in amateur dramatics. They both have four grandchildren, and when the pair had lunch, they even realised they had accounts with the same bank. Mr Richardson said: "There was an astounding moment when we put our cards on the desk to pay and we could almost have said 'snap'!" Mr Jemison mused: "My only worry is the number of people who probably think I've been ignoring them when they're been saying 'Hello John' to Neil all this time." Asked if she could tell them apart, Mrs Richardson said: "I certainly can – after 47 years together you don't make that mistake."

The two men have become friends. "We realised we agreed on almost everything, from politics to our theological views on the Church, education and what we think about Mr Gove, and the fact that we both write poetry," said Mr Richardson. *telegraph.co.uk, dailymail.co.uk, 31 Mar 2015.*

ROB POWELL / LONDON NEWS PICTURES

DEM OLD BONES?

What appeared to be a skeleton with twisted and bent bones showed up in the mud of the Thames at Gravesend in Kent on 11 March.

Rob Powell, who took this photograph at the town pier, said: "Obviously, it looked like a skeleton, which was a bit grim, and it was only when I got closer that I realised it was metal and old rope." *D.Mail, 12 Mar 2015.*

SIDELINES...

MICE ATONEMENT

Two men were detained in China last November after releasing more than 1,000 mice in a village in southern Guangdong province. They explained it was an "act of atonement", committed in the hope it might help an ill elderly relative get better. About 100 local people tried to catch the rodents, while health authorities sent poison. *BBC News, 17 Nov 2014.*

TAKING THE PEE

A thief stole 35 urine samples from a medical laboratory in San Diego, California – thinking they were drugs. *Sun, 25 Jan 2015.*

NOVEL GAMBIT

A burglar caught in the act told his victim: "I am a ghost, go back to sleep." Amazingly, the homeowner obliged, but when he awoke the next morning his wallet, laptop and phone were missing. He called police who arrested Bogdan Denisov in the Russian village of Streletskoye. *Metro, 13 Mar 2015.*

CRITICAL REBUFF

Someone in Kaliningrad (the old German city of Königsberg) daubed "Kant is a moron" on the former home of Immanuel Kant, the philosopher who wrote *Critique of Pure Reason*. *D.Telegraph, 19 Mar 2015.*

INVADERS INVADED

Vikings may have been made more violent by chronic worms, according to a Copenhagen University study, which found that excrement from a Viking camp in Denmark dating from 1018 contained the *Fasciola hepatica* parasite, found in farm animals. This causes extremely painful infections, and could well have left the Nordic warriors in a foul mood. *Sun, 4 Jan 2015.*

A HAUNTING EXPERIENCE

McKamey Manor in San Diego, California, claims to be the world's most extreme haunted house. Visitors are bound, gagged, drenched in blood and terrorised for four to seven hours. They are force fed, shouted at, and shut in small boxes. Astonishingly, there are 24,000 people on the waiting list. *Irish Independent, 25 Oct 2014.*

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SIDELINES...

HUSBAND'S SURPRISE

Chen, a 44-year-old married man from Zhejiang, eastern China, went to a doctor with stomach pains and blood in his urine – and was told he was actually a woman, with two X chromosomes. Though he claimed he had a good sex life with his wife (implying a functioning penis), he had full female reproductive organs and his symptoms were caused by having a period. *Sun, 24 July 2014.*

FISH TANK SAVES FAMILY

A family of five escaped a house blaze in Warrington, Cheshire, on 17 December when a fish tank shattered, spilling 22 gallons (100 litres) of water to douse the flames. Steve Whitehall, 48, had forgotten to blow out a Christmas candle in the living room before going to bed. The noise from the exploding tank woke the sleeping family. Two of their 15 fish survived. *D.Mirror, D.Mail, 20 Dec 2014.*

LET SLEEPING DOGS...

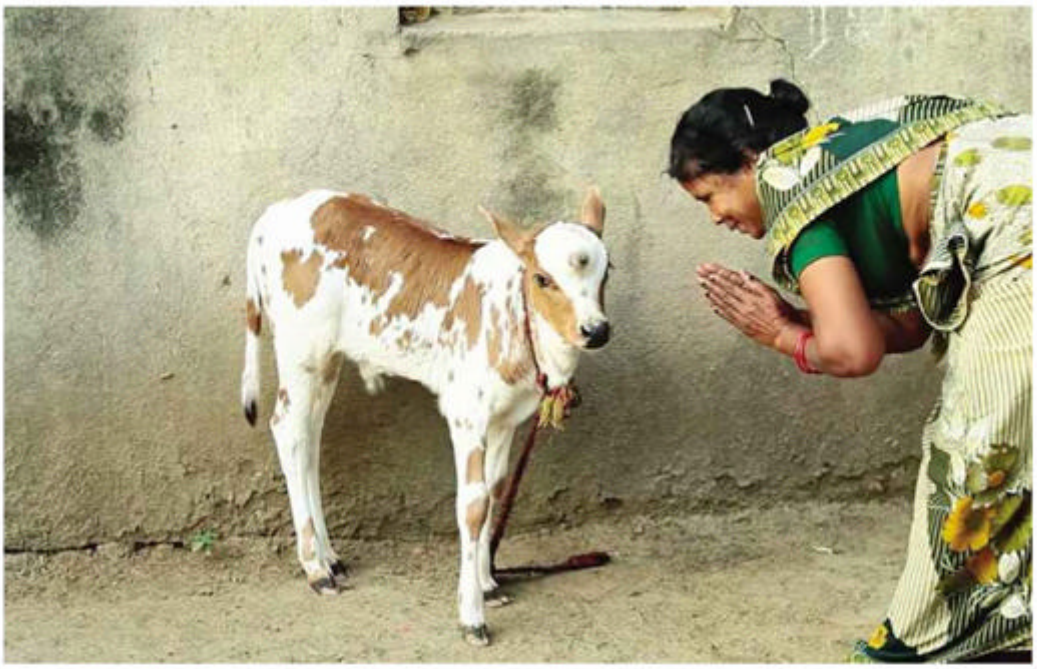
A driver in Chongqing, China, finding a stray dog lying in his favourite parking space, got out and kicked it to make it move. In revenge, it returned with its canine friends and chewed the bodywork and windscreen wipers of the attacker's car. The vandalism was photographed by a startled neighbour. *dailymail.co.uk, 11 Mar 2015.*

FOREIGN BODY

Fifty-one years ago, Arthur Lampitt of Granite City, Illinois, smashed his 1963 Thunderbird into a truck. In the first week of 2015, during a 45-minute operation in St Louis, a 7in (18cm) turn signal from his car was removed from his left arm. The accident had broken his hip, drawing attention away from the arm, which healed. He didn't know the signal was there until it set off a metal detector, and he waited another decade to have it removed when his arm swelled up. *Irish Independent, 3 Jan 2015.*

Prodigal creatures

Strange freaks of nature draw crowds around the world



CATERS NEWS AGENCY

ABOVE: Shiva the three-eyed calf has attracted enthusiastic visitors. **BELOW:** This unfortunate piglet from Yunan did not survive.

In India, a calf with three eyes was named Shiva (after the Hindu deity, who has a third eye). The two-week-old animal was attracting crowds of people to the home of its owner, named only as Maghala, in Kolathur, Tamil Nadu, so that they could touch the holy animal and pray for blessings. *Metro, 3 Oct 2014.*

A piglet with a beak-like face, huge eyes and peculiar growth on its forehead, said to resemble a penis, was born on Tao Lu's farm in Yanan township in the Chinese city of Nanning. It was in a large litter of 19 piglets, all the others being normal. After a local paper published photographs, Mr Tao, 40, received several offers of large sums of money for the little monster, so that it could be put on display to attract visitors; but it died shortly afterwards, having been rejected by its mother and refusing to feed from a bottle. Nanning is in southern China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. *express.co.uk, dailymail.co.uk, 9 Feb 2015.*

A farmer in Kenya was shocked to find that his goat had given birth to a kid with a 'human' face. Residents of Likoni Mombasa were seen on video flocking to the farm in order to catch a glimpse of the prodigy. The birth was causing a big furore in the usually quiet small town, as locals feared that it was the result of a man having sex with the goat. The owner, on the other hand, blamed witchcraft. *yourjewishnews.com, 17 Dec 2013.*

When a goat belonging to the Villalbas family from the Centro region of Argentina gave birth to mutant stillborn kid with a 'human' face, a friend posted photos online to highlight the results of excessive use of pesticides, but some local people concluded the freak was evidence of bestiality. An outraged Olga Villalba strongly denied the accusation. There is currently heated debate in Argentina as to whether the high levels of pesticides used in farming is causing health problems in the human population. *Metro, 4 Oct 2014.*

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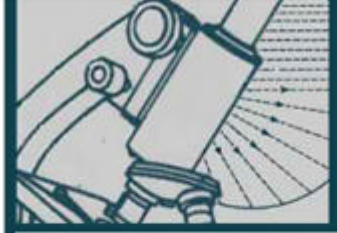

MATT PATTINSON

SCIENCE

I HEAL THE BODY ELECTRIC

DAVID HAMBLING looks at the past and future of electrical medicine – from frogs' legs and torpedo fish to the latest multi-million research programmes into electroceuticals

Electricity has been used for medical treatment since before 'electricity' was even discovered. Its mysterious and impressive power has been peddled by an endless stream of quacks and frauds as a remedy for every malady known to man, from cancer to impotence. Unsurprisingly, electrical treatment for physical ailments has been consigned to the realms of damnation; equally unsurprisingly, it is crawling back into the sunlight as researchers realise that there might be something to it after all.

It is important to distinguish between what electricity can and cannot do according to conventional belief. In the 18th century, Italian scientist Luigi Galvini showed that dead frogs' legs could be made to twitch by applying electricity, showing that the nervous system is essentially electric. It is perfect for muscle stimulation, which is why no medical drama is complete without a scene in which the surgeon yells 'Clear!' before jump-starting yet another patient's heart. Pacemakers and cochlear implants are routine; electrical stimulation is also used to exercise the muscles of immobile patients to prevent muscle wastage.

Other uses are more contentious. As long ago as the first century, Scribonius Largus recommended the electric shocks produced by the torpedo fish as a treatment for headaches and other forms of pain, and it has been used as a treatment ever since. The modern equivalent is the transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation or TENS machine, a battery-powered device widely used as a therapeutic treatment for pain. TENS is popular because it is cheap, safer than drugs with no risk of overdose, and can be administered by the patient. The NHS says it may be helpful for arthritis, back pain, neck pain and sports injuries, but notes that "its effectiveness in treating pain is based on individual experience rather than scientific evidence".

Years of study have failed to prove that TENS is more effective than a placebo. Some individual trials have produced positive results, while others show no effect at all. The lack of a good theoretical basis has hindered progress in this area, leaving TENS in the camp of alternative therapies of questionable value.

ORLANDO / THREE LIONS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Using deep shock therapy to treat sporting injuries in 1950s America.

If you're prepared to believe in TENS, how about electric shocks for treating snakebite? Dr Ron Guderian, an American doctor and missionary in Ecuador, has reported many successes with treating snakebite using spark plugs, stun guns, cattle prods and other devices. He only recommends this treatment when antivenom and medical facilities are not available, but claims that the technique has been proven in the field from Venezuela to Kenya to Thailand. Studies by sceptical Western doctors have failed to produce positive results. Guderian attributes this partly to the fact that none of them involve using venom on human patients, only on animal substitutes that react quite differently.

At the more scientific end of the spectrum, Kevin Tracey of the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research in New York is looking at a new treatment for arthritis. In the late 1990s, Tracey found that the effects of an anti-inflammatory drug appeared to be transmitted by a rat's nervous system. Further experimentation showed that neurotransmitters

HOW ABOUT ELECTRIC SHOCKS FOR TREATING SNAKEBITE?

produced by the rats' nerves were controlling the spleen, which produced tumour necrosis factor (TNF). As the name suggests, TNF helps destroy cancers, but it also causes inflammation. By reducing the production of TNF in the spleen, the inflammation is reduced.

This research has led Tracey to develop an implanted nerve stimulator that sends tiny jolts through the vagus nerve, which sends signals to the spleen. The idea is that this can get the spleen to stop producing TNFs, which cause the joint pains associated with arthritis. This is not straightforward because the vagus nerve is not a single line but a whole bundle of them, like the mass fibre optic cables connecting every house in the street, and it's not clear how to stimulate the right one without side-effects. However, Tracey's initial results are positive. Eight volunteers with implants have all reported reduced levels of arthritic pain.

If the proponents are right, we could be on the verge of a new era of targeted electromedicine. The idea is to tap into the body's electrical control system and correct problems at the root, developing a new range of devices and treatments known as 'electroceuticals'.

Last May the FDA approved the first of a new class of devices, an implant that treats sleep apnœa (interrupted breathing while asleep) by regulating breathing. Next up is a device that helps with weight control by stimulating the vagus nerve to give the feeling of a full stomach. There is also a project to control asthma by stimulating the vagus nerve.

Pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline is pouring money into this area. They have spent over $50m on research as well as offering a million-dollar prize for an implantable device that could both read nerve signals and reliably stimulate a specific nerve for two months. GSK are looking at electroceuticals for a range of chronic conditions, including arthritis, diabetes, hypertension and chronic pains.

Conspiracy theorists might expect big pharma to stamp out the competition, but big pharma is leading the way. The sort of conditions that they are likely to be treating are ones where drugs are not satisfactory; electroceuticals will not be competition but an additional source of profit.

However, much of the work in this field is still at the trial and error stage with little indication of why it works. It is not really clear that we have moved beyond the stage of standing on fish.

"Right now, a lot is based on phenomenology," Kip Ludwig of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders told the journal *Nature*. "You put an electrode in the body, you stimulate, and you get an effect."

The US National Institute of Health is planning to put things on a more scientific footing with a six-year plan to map out how different nerves affect different organs. For the time being though, electroceuticals are in the grey area of showing promise without being proven, just like TENS: only halfway back from being damned.

Keep watching – but don't forget how promising electroshock therapy for mental patients was a few decades ago.

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MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archæology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.tandfonline.com/rtam)

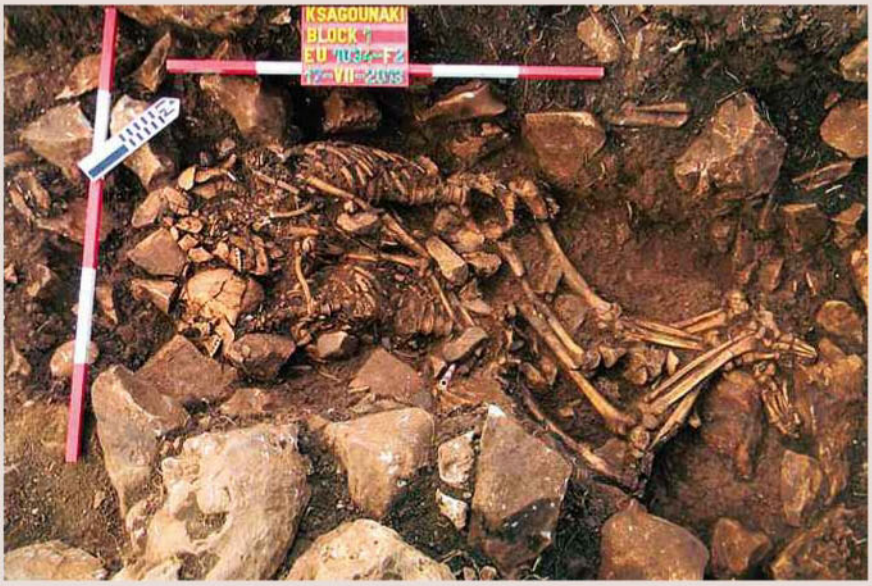
THE EMBRACE OF TIME

The *c.*6,000-year-old skeletons of a man and woman entwined in an embrace have been unearthed by archæologists at the northern entrance of the Alepotrypa ('Foxhole') cave in southern Greece, on the Peloponnese peninsula. Both had been in their early twenties, and it is not known how they died, though flint arrowheads found near them might give a clue. The cave had been sealed by a rock-fall due to an earthquake in remote antiquity, and over recent years has been yielding many finds of archæological interest. *Phys.Org, 14 Feb; National Geographic News, 20 Feb 2015*.

STONY SECRETS OF THE SANDS

Over the past decade some 200 unexplained stone structures of various configurations have been noted in the Gobi Desert – in the Flaming Mountain area in Turpan, north-west China, extending over more than two-and-a-half square miles (6.5km^2). The rocks used in their construction are said to be non-local. Dr Volker Heyd, an archæologist at the University of Bristol, says that he has seen similar features in the eastern neighbour of Mongolia, where they are regarded as ritual features. He reckons that the first of the Gobi stone structures might date back as early as the Bronze Age, although the more complex formations are likely "younger and could have been constructed until the Mediæval period."

The structures tend to be built on prominent points in the landscape. Some are square, with 'exits' to combine certain shapes, others are circular. For instance, one feature, known as the 'Sun Circle', comprises four concentric circles, the largest measuring 26ft (8m) in diameter; on its southeast side there are multiple circles of different sizes. Very little is known about the purpose of these Gobi stone structures: local opinion has it that they were sacrificial worship sites for ancient nomadic people, and that they were related to sun worship. But in truth, nobody really knows. The sands of the Gobi keep their secrets still. *dailymail.co.uk, 27 Mar 2015.*



GREEK MINISTRY OF CULTURE

ABOVE: The embracing skeletons found in the Alepotrypa cave in Greece. **BELOW:** Some 200 stone circles have been discovered in the Gobi Desert since 2003. **FACING PAGE:** The 'rolling sun' phenomenon at Silbury Hill, Wiltshire, where the setting sun seems to descend down the mound's slope when viewed from a spot marked in Neolithic times.

ALIEN DNA

A news story that has had some of the 'gonzo archæology' enthusiasts buzzing with talk of scientific proof that humans have extraterrestrial ancestry seems to have inadvertently resulted from a paper in *Genome Biology* (http://genomebiology.com/2015/16/1/50), written by a group of Cambridge University researchers. It is true that the paper reports that in a study carefully screened against contamination, "foreign" genes were discovered in the genomes of selected insects, worms and primates, including humans. In the case of humans, they identified 145 such 'alien' genes, i.e. genes not passed on from our ancestors – or to put that another way, genetic material that does not belong to the normal line of ancestral DNA ("vertical genetic transfer" – VGT) of the *Homo* genus. But hold on, this does not mean that our species was originally sired on some far distant planet in a star field like the Pleiades: the authors point to a more earthbound phenomenon called "Horizontal Gene Transfer" (HGT).

HGT is the movement of genetic material, often via bacteria and other micro-organisms, between separate species living in the same environment. It is a known process in simple organisms, but this paper shows it has also occurred in more complex creatures such as humans – an idea that had been controversial. This means that though the main amount of heritable material, DNA, is passed from parent to offspring, HGT contributes an additional genetic element to the evolution of probably all creatures, great and small. Although most HGT genes in humans are ancient, it is a process that could be continuing at a low level.

So while we humans might not be the progeny of some marauding starship troopers in the long ago, it is worth remembering that we are in any case extraterrestrial, in a sense – our atoms are stardust after all. *Genome Biology, 13 Mar; dailymail.co.uk, 13 Mar 2015*.

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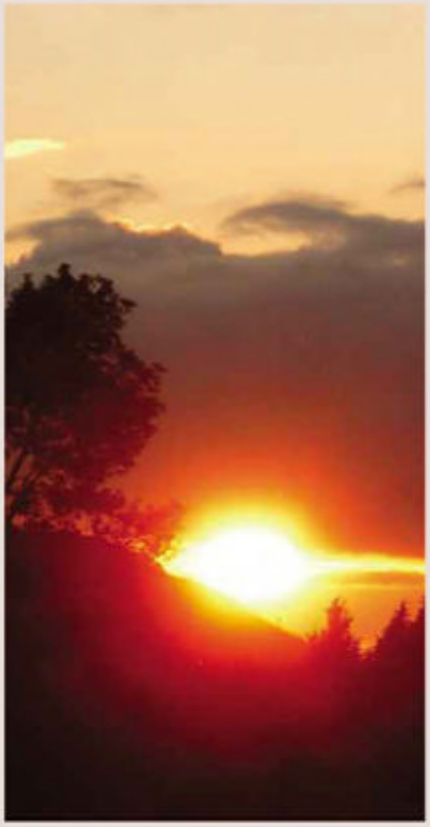
SOLAR SPIRALS?

A rare panel of prehistoric rock art has been found at Lochán na Sídhe near Tourmakeady in County Mayo, Ireland. The spiral engravings are on an ancient Christian pilgrimage route to the west coast mountain of Croagh Patrick (indicating the pagan antiquity of such routes). Revealed by foraging animals, the panel had been concealed behind an outcrop known as St Patrick's Chair, which itself has some 250 petroglyphs on its surface. The carved spirals on the newly discovered panel are not as weathered as those on the Chair, due to the shelter afforded by its concealment. Archæologist Michael Gibbons said that the site dates back about 5,800 years. "Rock art is more frequent in the southwest, in Donegal and in Wicklow, but is very elusive in the west," he remarked.

The rock art is thought by some to have been inspired by the 'rolling sun' phenomenon, where the setting sun appears to glide down the remarkably regular flank of Croagh Patrick during the months of April and August. A similar phenomenon has been noted at various other venerated locations, including Silbury Hill, at Avebury in Wiltshire (see *Time & Mind*, Nov 2010, pp.291-300). *Irish Times, 27 Feb 2015.*



PAUL DEVEREUX

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

187: THE FIRST SPIN DOCTOR

"A Member of Parliament cannot be stupider than his constituents, for the more stupid he is, the more stupid they were to elect him" – Bertrand Russell

Boris Johnson probably has read it, but I doubt any of our other politicos and their advisors are all that familiar with the *Commentariolum Petitionis* ('Little Handbook on Electioneering'), supposedly written by Quintus Cicero to help his more famous brother Marcus win the consular election for 63 BC. Some question its authorship. That hardly matters here. If you want the ancestor of Alastair Campbell, Lynton Crosby, Karl Rove, et hoc genus omne, whether you see this before or after 7 May, Read On.

Space only for a few extracts, enough to show that dirty tricks, negative campaigning, political toxicity, are as old as the seven hills of Rome. There's a complete translation with commentary by Philip Freeman, *How to Win an Election: An Ancient Guide for Modern Politicians* (2012), also an online English version with instructive commentary by James Carville, self-confessed distributor of 'hate sheets' in aid of Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign.

"Cultivate special interest groups. Exploit young supporters to the fullest.

"Call in all favours owing. Tell all who owe you anything to repay you with their support. Assure everyone else that voting for you will put you in their debt. Above all, get the traditional big names on your side. Make sure they believe you are one of them. Don't say anything to rock their political boat.

"Hammer home the personal defects of your opponents. You can dismiss the weaker ones as not worth talking about. It's Antonius and Catiline you should be destroying. Remind the voters that Antonius celebrated being elected prætor by going to the slave market and blatantly buying a girl to keep as a sex slave.

"As for Catiline, Well, I ask you! Family were the dregs, shagged his own sister, abused young boys almost in their parents' laps, murdered his own brother-in-law, took a club to his rival Marcus Marius, killed Roman citizens and businessmen on the say-so of late dictator Sulla. And, I don't need to remind you of what he did in Africa…

"Make sure your family, friends, neighbours, clients, even slaves past and present can be trusted. Don't forget that anything bad about you gets publicised by somebody close to you.

"The three vote-winners are favours, hope, and palm-greasing. Get the right people on your side. Doing them even small favours works. Emphasise that you'll never forget a supporter. Promise people anything. You can get everybody on your side if you adapt your speeches and promises to different audiences.

"Make sure you know who to flatter, who to ignore. Don't waste time on people who have no clout. Your chief targets should be the top people socially, rich aristocrats, and successful businessmen.

"Don't entirely ignore the others, though. Shake their hands and make sure you remember all their names. After all, they're not stupid, they'll only support you if they think there's something in it for themselves.

"I'll say it again, get young people on your side. They have the energy to go around canvassing for you, winning over the punters, distributing your literature, you name it… And, being surrounded by young enthusiasts makes you look good.

"People are impressed by the size and kind of crowds you attract. And you should separate the wheat from the chaff. People who call on you at home will do the same for other candidates, so don't take them too seriously. The ones who campaign in person with you and applaud your speeches are the ones to keep in with, by flattery and promises.

"Also, don't underrate your enemies. Put on a good face, organise a charm offensive, make them feel you could be a better friend than rival to them.

"A candidate who wants to win must be a chameleon, adapt to every different voter he meets, vary his looks and words according to the occasion. Promise everything to everyone. If somebody asks for something you can't do, be sure to manufacture an excuse that won't offend.

"Show yourself the People's Friend. They like a good show, so provide one. They love a good scandal, so keep reminding them of your opponents' crimes, corruptions, and personal scandals, especially sexual ones.

"Rule Number One is: don't let your promises be too specific. Tell each group – Senate, People, Business Community, the Rich – what they want to hear, but no details – Stick to vague generalities.

"Our city is a cesspool of lies, plots, and vices of all kinds. You have to get down in the dirt, unnerve your opponents with threats, don't be discouraged by talk of their briberies, keep them off guard at all times – Fear of reprisals works better than actually doing anything…"

Imagine Roman politicians and spin doctors in our world of Social Media, Twitter Storms, and suchlike…

The result? Cicero won, Antonius a close second. Catiline a distant third. He ran again the following year, lost, turned to armed revolution, was killed, as would be the two Ciceros 20-odd years later in the civil wars following Cæsar's fatal day of Ides and Seek.

"You can oppose an absurdity only with some other absurdity" – Fort, *Books*, p17.

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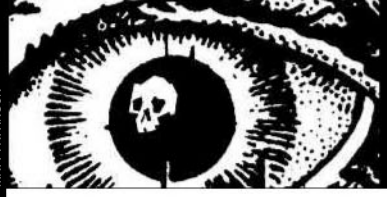


MATT PATTINSON

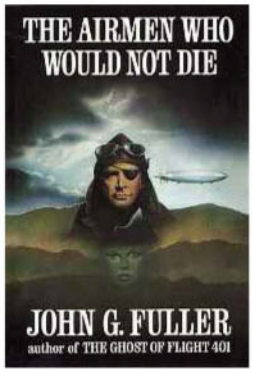
GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE revisits the paranormal controversy around a notorious air disaster

THE AIRMEN WHO WOULD NOT DIE RE-EXAMINED

In the field of paranormal research it has often been declared by sceptics – almost as a mantra – that 'extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence'. Few seem to realise that this is not a working scientific principle but a philosophical or social one.

The concept of 'extraordinary evidence' involves a subjective judgment, but it is often used merely as a dismissive sound bite rather than as a basis for any proper analysis of data. More pertinently, what seems extraordinary to one person may be depressingly familiar to another more knowledgeable and experienced person, and what is deemed extraordinary is likely to shift with time as scientific knowledge increases and culture changes. Indeed, as stated in a judicial context by Lord Salmon in the context of evidence law: "What is striking in one age is normal in another: the perversions of yesterday may be the routine or the fashion of tomorrow" – Lord Salmon in *Boardman v Director of Public Prosecutions* [1974] 3 All ER 887.



How true. Just a generation ago it seemed like some extraordinary evidence for life after death was available, as detailed in a book *The Airmen Who Would Not Die* (1979) by John G Fuller. This told the remarkable story of a series of predictions and séances involving the American medium Eileen Garrett, arising from the crash of the R101 airship near Beauvais in France on 5 October 1930 while on a flight to India. A number of people claimed forewarnings of the disaster, which claimed some 48 lives, attracting wide attention at the time, including Mrs Eileen Garrett, a medium of repute who had three visions of a smouldering airship over London before the tragedy. She relayed warnings of disaster ahead for the R-101 to a Mrs Emilie Hinchliffe, the widow of an aviator who had disappeared flying to America in 1928. Garrett also gave a personal warning of the content of the messages she had received to Sir Sefton Branckner, Director of Civil Aviation at the Air Ministry, but he remained committed to the R101 flight to India with the result his own wife was killed in the crash.

Now predicting an air disaster in the circumstances may not be the most remarkable piece of foresight, given there were safety concerns about the capability of the R101 before it flew. However, what distinguishes the R101 case are events immediately afterwards, with the communications channelled by Garrett at a séance conducted on 7 October 1930, attended by psychical researcher Harry Price and Ian Coster, a journalist, who were attempting to contact the spirit of the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Unexpectedly, evidential material relating to the R101 crash came through, purportedly issuing from Flt Lt HC Irwin, the dead captain of the airship. This was duly recorded by a shorthand writer. Subsequent trance sittings were held with Garrett and Major Oliver G Villiers, then an Air Ministry Intelligence Officer, in which further technical details emerged, there being no black box flight recorders in those days, requiring the cause of the crash to be pieced together slowly from fragments. Certain factual and technical details provided by Garrett seemed to make this a plausible case of post-mortem communication, and for many readers Fuller's compelling book seemed like a conclusive case. However, Garrett herself had commissioned an investigation by Archie Jarman, a sceptical psychical researcher, who duly researched the case and produced an 80,000 word report, which was circulated privately in very limited form in the 1960s before Garrett's death in 1970.

Following the publication of Fuller's book in 1979 Archie Jarman produced a highly dismissive if somewhat ambiguous article, seemingly as a spoiler, declaring that the R101 séances did not stand up as evidence of survival. This article appeared in the excellent but sadly short-lived paranormal magazine *Alpha* in early 1980. Jarman called into question various technical assessments and the competence of the record keeping by Villiers, and any casual reader certainly might think it put paid to the case for a paranormal explanation for the messages received by Garrett.

Six years later the sceptical writer Melvyn Harris devoted 11 pages to the story in his book *Investigating the Unexplained* (1986), dismissing the evidence as entirely inadequate. An example of Harris's debunking technique was illustrated by his treatment of one statement received from the alleged spirit of Irwin, which declared on 7 October that the airship had "almost scraped the roofs at Achy" – a tiny hamlet, unmarked on road maps, over which the doomed R101 had flown. Harris breezily claimed that Garrett must have subconsciously recalled this location whilst in trance, the source of her

FOX PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: R101 moored at Cardington, 1929. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Psychic Eileen Garrett purportedly channelled messages from the airship's dead captain, Flt Lt HC Irwin.

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TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Officials investigating the wreckage of the R101, which crashed in flames in a forest in Beauvais, near Paris, killing 48 people.

knowledge being that she had "frequently motored from Calais to Paris in the Twenties. The road she had taken carried her past Achy which was vividly signposted". The source of Harris's information on this point is something of a mystery. Nonetheless, it seemed as if the case for a paranormal explanation of the content of the séances was not proven; indeed, it seemed increasingly shaky, given the reputed depth of Jarman's report, though precious few researchers had actually examined the original.

However, there now emerges a new study conducted by writer Steve Hume, demonstrating that an assessment of evidence can change dramatically from one generation to the next. Hume traced one of the surviving copies of Jarman's original report, obtained from Senate House Library where it had been located amongst the papers of the late Eric Dingwall. Undertaking a re-examination of the communications, the report and other surviving material, he has produced an extensively referenced study, 'The R101 Séance in the light of the once-secret Jarman report', the second instalment of which has just been published in the spring 2015 edition of *Light* magazine. Hume reveals that far from dismissing a paranormal explanation, Jarman actually believed – at least when writing his report – that the Garrett séances indicated a psychic faculty at work.

It seems that Jarman was satisfied at the time of his commission report that there was evidence for either telepathy or survival worth considering. He stated, "If Coster [the journalist] is eliminated, we have to consider seriously whether Mrs Garrett was in communication with the discarnate Irwin." The alternative was to postulate that Coster had in the space of 60 hours first travelled to Cardington (the base of the R101) to collect technical information, then journeyed by road and sea all the way to France, visited the crash site, interviewed eyewitnesses at Achy, and then come back to participate in the séance, all within the space of 60 hours from the moment of the crash. Interestingly, Hume has also traced a letter written by former airship pilot William H Wood in 1950 – described as "a card-carrying atheist" – who stated that the technical terminology which emerged in the Garrett séance, "could not have been used by anyone but an airship pilot… the case has absolutely convinced me even if it has not convinced other rationalists".

Morning Post

R101: REMARKABLE SEANCE

ONE PENNY

CERTAIN DETAILS SEEMED TO MAKE THIS A CASE OF POST-MORTEM COMMUNICATION

Hume himself observes that a single case like this does not establish life after death to a scientific standard, and admits that much work still remains to be done, since the R101 case is "massive in scope"; but his detailed examination certainly restores the case to a level of one presenting cogent evidence (if not extraordinary evidence, whatever that means) and worthy of further investigation by any technically qualified scholar or scholars.

And what of Melvyn Harris's theory of subconscious recall of the name Achy? Interestingly, from what evidence has emerged, it seems that Garrett had never motored through France for the simple reason she couldn't drive (Jarman in fact noted this). Pondering this, it occurred to me that perhaps as a car passenger Garrett might be better placed to navigate and accordingly notice things on maps, rather like another medium, Joan Grant, who explored France in 1956-60 and described herself as "a confirmed map addict" who would "rather find myself in a noble cellar without a cork-screw than find myself in France without Michelin's large-scale, one centimeter=2 kilometres series." (See *A Lot to Remember*, 1962, by Joan Grant). However, from what evidence that can be found, it appears Garrett can only be placed in France travelling by train on trips to the Riviera, duly enjoying the views from aboard trains. The nearest railway line runs 20km (12 miles) from Achy, so it is improbable she could ever have seen any road sign. (*Light, vol.136, no.1, Spring 2015; Alpha #6, Jan/Feb 1980.*)

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DAVID MCNEW / GETTY IMAGES

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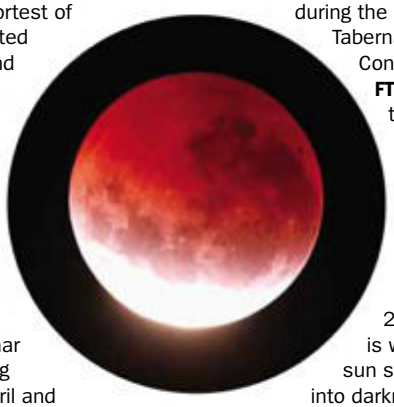
TOM MACKIE

SKY PORTENTS

1 Residents of Chelyabinsk in Siberia witnessed an optical illusion in the dawn sky – what looked like a triple sunrise. This exceptionally distinct parhelion, or halo effect, was caused by ice crystals, the product of a particularly chilly morning, refracting sunlight. A few days earlier, locals had another unexpected sight when blue-tinged snow covered the city's streets. A local factory making colouring for Easter eggs experienced a spill, causing the powered dye to escape into the air and come to rest on the snow outside. Chelyabinsk should be getting accustomed to unusual events: on 15 February 2013, a massive meteor was seen shooting across the sky above the city, disintegrating before fragments landed in nearby Lake Chebarkul [**FT300:7**]. More than 1,100 people were injured by the blast, 31 seriously, and 3,000 buildings damaged. *BBC News, 17 Feb 2015.*

2 A 'blood Moon' shines over the Los Angeles skyline during a total lunar eclipse on 4 April 2015. The red/brown hue is caused by Rayleigh scattering of sunlight through the Earth's atmosphere. The eclipse, the shortest of the century, lasted four minutes and 43 seconds and could be seen all over America, Asia and parts of Australia. It was the third in a series of four lunar eclipses known as a 'lunar tetrad', following those on 15 April and 8 October 2014. The final one of the series will occur on 28 September 2015. According to NASA, the current century – 2001 to 2100 – will have eight tetrads. The first took place in 2003.

Some biblical scryers such as John Hagee and Mark Bilz believe that the tetrad has special significance because the eclipses coincide with important Jewish festivals: the two in April 2014 and 2015 occurred at the same time as Passover, while the ones in October and September occur during the Feast of the Tabernacle (see The Conspirasphere **FT326:7**). This, they suggest, is connected to a biblical prophecy of the End Times, found in the Book of Joel 2:31, where it is written: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come." (This verse is approximately repeated in Acts 2:20). "The sun shall be turned into darkness" is thought to refer to the solar eclipse of 20 March 2015.



However, eight of the tetrads since the first century AD have coincided with Jewish holidays without the world going under; and three of the four lunar eclipses in the current tetrad were/will be not visible in the biblical homeland of Israel/Palestine. *D.Telegraph, 7 April 2015; timeanddate.com.*

3 This startling face formed by the aurora was captured by Norfolk-based photographer Tom Mackie, 55, during a trip to Iceland earlier this year. "I've never seen it form a face like this before," said Mr Mackie, who runs regular trips to Iceland and Norway to photograph the aurora. "When there is high solar activity like when we took this shot, you do get the reds. This was something special – 50 per cent of the population of Iceland actually believes in trolls and this is something they were amazed by. Funnily enough, the best aurora I've seen was actually here in Norfolk." *D.Express, 15 Nov 2014.*

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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Eccentric tunneller's house becomes art studio and heavenly tourist admits he made it all up

ABOVE LEFT: The one-time home of William Lyttle, the Moleman of Hackney. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The aptly-named Alex Malarkey.

THE MOLE MAN OF HACKNEY [FT215:4, 269:26]

William Lyttle (c.1921-2010) spent 40 years digging a labyrinth of tunnels under his 20-room Victorian house on the corner of Stamford Road and Mortimer Road in Hackney, northeast London, before being evicted by the council in 2006. Last September, the "art-power couple" Sue Webster and Tim Noble bought the derelict house at auction. They plan to sustain the underground network and use it as a studio – they did an installation of mazes in 2011, so are used to getting lost – but the project is proving a feat worthy of Theseus himself. "So far we have cleared 23 skips of rubble as the roof collapsed," said Webster. "It's like a piece of our work – a piece of trash to recycle into something that will become a piece of history." *(London) Eve. Standard, 12 Sept 2014.*

LOAD OF MALARKEY [FT291:40-44]

In November 2004, six-year-old Alex Malarkey and his father Kevin from Ohio were in a near-fatal car crash. Alex awoke from a two-month coma to announce that angels had taken him through the gates of Heaven, where he had met and talked to Jesus (and Satan – though what the Lord of Darkness was doing there is a puzzle). With his father he co-wrote a memoir – *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven* – that became a bestseller in 2010 and was made into a television movie; but this year, on the website pulpitandpen.org, he admitted making it all up. Publisher Tyndale House then withdrew the book. Alex's parents are divorced and he lives with his mother Beth in Huntsville, Ohio. On her blog, Mrs Malarkey says the family receives no money from the book's sale, and reveals that Alex previously admitted to a pastor that the book was made up, but was told the publication – part of a popular genre of books known as "heavenly tourism" – was "blessing" people and to keep quiet. *telegraph.co.uk, 16 Jan; Adelaide Advertiser, 18 Jan 2015.*

He announced that he had talked to Jesus and Satan

Another apparent fantasist was exposed a few months earlier. Somaly Mam, one of the world's leading anti-sex slavery activists and author of *The Road of Lost Innocence* (2007), got bounced from the Somaly Mam Foundation when her heartbreaking tale of being sold into child prostitution fell apart, with a devastating cover story in *Newsweek*. The Cambodian, now aged about 44, had rubbed shoulders with a host of VIPs, including Queen Sophia of Spain, Hillary Clinton, Oprah Winfrey, and Susan Sarandon. *Time* magazine included her among "the 100 most influential people in the world". She claimed she was an orphan, sold into sexual slavery and repeatedly raped and abused for years. She only worked up the courage to escape in 1993 after seeing a friend killed in front of her.

Over the last 20 years, she struggled to keep her story straight, claiming variously to have been sold into slavery aged four or five, nine or 10, or about 16. Her narrative has been picked apart by childhood friends who said she grew up with both parents, graduated from high school and led a happy, comfortable childhood. While she continues to stick to her story – and last September *Marie Claire* magazine managed to find people in Cambodian villages who backed her up – an independent investigation by a Boston law firm employed by her own foundation had been as damning as the *Newsweek* exposé. *New York Post, 30 May; Marie Claire, 16 Sept 2014.*

FLIGHT MH370 [FT313:4]

A week after the Malaysian plane vanished with 239 souls on 8 March 2014, *Fortean Times* commented: "Either all will be explained by the time you read this, or MH370 will be on the way to becoming a classic conundrum covered in fortean anthologies for years to come." Well, the mystery persists. A solitary piece of potential evidence was found on a beach in Western Australia near the town of Cervantes: an unwrapped moist towelette (or wet wipe) branded with the Malaysia Airlines logo. It was found on 2 July, four months after the plane vanished, but was not made public until March 2015. A spokesman for the Australian Transport Safety Bureau said: "It is unlikely, however, that such a common item with no unique identifier could be conclusively linked with MH370." *ABC News, 11 Mar 2015.*

THE BIG SLEEP [FT316:8]

A leading Russian professor investigating the causes of the mysterious sleeping disorder that for two years has affected hundreds of residents in Kalachi, a village in northern Kazakhstan, believes that it could spread, and admits that its causes are still unknown. His warning came as the ninth wave of the unidentified illness hit the area at the beginning of March 2015. Those affected by the illness very suddenly fall asleep at any time of day or night, and often it is not possible to wake them for several days.

In all, 120 people have fallen ill since March 2013, and given that some people have succumbed more than once, 152 cases of the disease have been reported. Professor Leonid Rikhvanov from the Department of Geo-ecology and Geo-chemistry at the Tomsk Polytechnic University

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in Russia, who has spent four years studying the area, says that the long-term effects of the disease are unknown. "During hospitalisation, people exposed to the disease were marked by identical complaints: dizziness, weakness, loss of coordination, unconsciousness or semiconscious state for up to three days," he said. "After passing the first symptoms, they get headaches, become confused, and suffer emotional instability and memory disorders, which can last up to several weeks. In some cases, hallucinations occur, particularly in children. Some repeatedly fall asleep."

Rikhvanov believes that the root of the illness could be radon gas seeping from the abandoned Soviet uranium mine in nearby Krasnogorsk – but this does not account for some people being affected and not others in close proximity. Other theories put forward include carbon monoxide poisoning and mass hysteria, but no explanation is completely satisfactory. Local authorities have started evacuating people from the village and Rikhvanov believes about 650 residents in total will leave. *Newsweek, 5 Mar 2015.*

HYPNO-HEIST [FT323:9]

Last September, the proprietor of a London off-licence was somehow hypnotised into letting a man relieve him of a wad of cash. Then at about 1.30pm on 28 November, two men approached a 40-year-old woman as she was shopping with her young child in Middlesbrough, Cleveland. They told her that they could sense "black magic" and that they could get rid of it for her. The woman allowed the men to follow her home, where they persuaded her to remove all her jewellery and put it in a bag, which they then made off with. They spoke in Punjabi and another language, believed to be Pushtu. As in the London heist, the suspects were caught on CCTV, but as far as we know, this has not helped in the apprehension of any of these ingenious villains. *Middlesbrough Gazette, 7 Jan 2015.*

A–Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

COSTA RICAN DODOS

Found only on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, the dodo *Raphus cucullatus* is the most iconic extirpated species of modern times. This large flightless bird, related to the pigeon, became extinct in or around 1681, less than a century after its island paradise, previously free of all predators, was invaded and settled by Dutch sailors. They killed it for food and disrupted its habitat, aided and abetted by an entourage of hostile introduced species, including rats, domestic cats, dogs, and pigs.

Consequently, the posting on YouTube on 3 March 2015 of a brief video clip purporting to be recent trail-cam footage shot at night by an amateur reptile enthusiast that showed not only an iguana but also at least two apparent dodos alive and well and living in jungle within the Central American country of Costa Rica attracted great interest. Having said that, even to my eyes, untrained as they are in the specifics of special effects, it seemed evident that the dodos were merely computer-generated images, and not particularly good ones at that. Even so, there were a few voices that seemingly wanted to believe they were real, despite the many additional, non-cinematographic objections to living dodos in Costa Rica.

How had dodos even come to be in a Costa Rican jungle, many thousands of miles from their Mauritius homeland? There is no documented evidence that dodos were ever taken there. And, of even more pertinence, how had a flightless species from an island originally lacking in predators managed to survive in Costa Rica's predator-replete jungle (amply supplied with wild cats, dogs, birds of prey, venomous snakes, etc)? And not for just a short time, but for over 300 years, because if they were real, the videoed dodos must be descendants of specimens transported to Costa Rica and released there prior to their species' extinction on Mauritius in the late 17th century.

True, Costa Rica's jungle is home to a long-established group of large ground-dwelling birds known as tinamous. However, the key difference between dodos and tinamous surviving here is that the latter birds originated in Latin America's tropical forests and grasslands, and they have thus evolved a number of crucial behavioural and morphological adaptations in order to persist in such predator-populated habitats. These include active predator-recognition and avoidance, freeze-motion behaviour, cryptic plumage and, although preferring a terrestrial existence, nonetheless retaining the ability to take flight – some species even roost in trees. The dodo, conversely, having evolved in a predator-free homeland, displayed none of these critical survival strategies (which is why they soon became extinct once predators finally arrived on Mauritius). Hence they could not have stayed alive for more than a few days if released into Costa's Rica's jungle, let alone establish a thriving population here. Nor would such distinctive, flightless birds have eluded the many scientific expeditions visiting this locality in modern times.

In short, the whole concept of dodos living in Costa Rica was a nonsense. And so it proved. On 13 March, a second Costa Rican dodo video was posted on YouTube, in which a dodo tapped the camera's lens with its beak before displaying a series of captions, written in Portuguese, which stated that although it was too late to save its species, there were many endangered species out there for which there was still time, if action was taken. The two videos were in fact an advertising campaign for a Brazilian conservation-awareness website, 'Quase um Dodo' ['Almost a Dodo'] (at http://quaseumdodo.com.br/), and one that, thanks to its memorable Costa Rican dodo controversy, had proved to have been a brilliantly executed one, attracting considerable, much-deserved attention to its site and aims.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXkikM2M0HE; www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPkB5Hs_f4E 13

MYTHICAL CREATURES DOWN IN DENVER

The Denver Museum of Nature and Science (DMNS) in Colorado is hosting a fascinating, admission-free exhibition from 20 March to 7 September 2015. Entitled 'Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns & Mermaids', it contains separate sections featuring the legendary creatures of water, land, and air, as well as one devoted entirely to dragons. Highlights include a 10ft (3m) model of a kraken with head and tentacles rising from the floor, and a fascinating Feejee mermaid; a large griffin statue, a unicorn statue, and a model of a *Gigantopithecus* jaw; a model of a roc and spectacular phoenix-related artefacts from the Middle and Far East; and a stupendous 17ft (5m)-long model dragon sporting a 20ft (6m) wingspan. Many associated activities will also be taking place. Check out the DMNS's website for full details.
www.dmns.org/mythic-creatures/exhibition-features/

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TOO MANY FAIRY DOORS

PROFUSION OF PIXIE PORTALS IN A SOMERSET WOOD LEADS TO CALLS FOR A CLAMPDOWN

MATT CARDY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Children may be delighted by the tiny doors, but the trustees of Wayford Woods have appealed to fairy house builders to tone down their "garish" constructions.

In the last couple of years, *Fortean Times* has noted the appearance of "fairy doors" set in tree trunks near Birmingham, Wokingham (Berkshire) and Holbrook (Derbyshire) in the UK, Buncrana in Donegal, and in Minneapolis (MN) and Ann Arbor (MI) in the US (see **FT322:69**). Now "Fairy control" has had to be brought in at a wood in Somerset to curb the "profusion of elfin construction".

Hundreds of fairy doors have been attached to the bases of beech, ash and oak trees in Wayford Woods, Crewkerne. The doors have allegedly been installed by local people so children can "leave messages for the fairies"; but trustee Steven Acreman said: "We've got little doors everywhere. We're not anti-fairies but it's in danger of getting out of control."

Originally an extension of nearby Wayford Manor Gardens, the 29 acres (12ha) of woodland boasts a stream, meadow and ornamental lake. Set up as a charitable trust in the 1990s, it wasn't until 2000 that the first fairy moved into the woods and installed a "little door" in the roots of a tree. "It fitted perfectly, it had a little turned handle and inside was a bed. We didn't know who had done it but we left it there," said Mr Acreman. "But then another door appeared and now it's gathered momentum."

At its peak a year ago, more than 200 little doors had been screwed, nailed and installed on trees. Sometimes tiny doll's house chairs and beds would be found behind the doors, and delighted children would flock from far and wide to leave notes for the fairies – reassuring them that they believed they exist, and asking them to grant wishes.

> **"We're not anti-fairy, but it's getting out of control"**

"We had a complete fairy fairground arrive [complete with 2ft-high slides and swings], but we rejected that planning proposal," said Mr Acreman. With elfin construction now including "more and more garish" plywood doors with "lots of tinsel and glittery stuff", Mr Acreman said they have had to bring in "quality control" to remove the worst offenders. "It's a very complex situation and nobody's admitting that they're evicting the fairies," he said. "It's just that fairy control is required otherwise we'd be covered in fairy doors. We've had as many as 10 doors put up on a single tree; they surrounded the tree."

Furzey Gardens in the New Forest has around 30 fairy doors, but they are discreet, designed and carved by master thatcher Simon Sinkinson. Several companies offer fairy doors for sale. Philippa Edmunds founded her firm, Fairydoorz, after making one for her young daughter. Her products are now stocked in Harvey Nichols. *BBC News, independent.co, 4 Mar; D.Telegraph, 6 Mar; D.Mail, 7 Mar 2015.*

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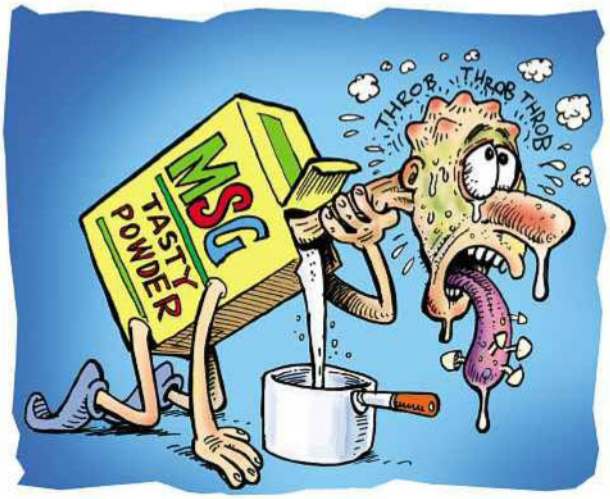
MATT CARDY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: More than 100 fairy doors have appeared in Wayford Woods.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

188: CHINESE RESTAURANT SYNDROME



HUNT EMERSON

The myth

Eating food containing the flavour enhancer Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) commonly causes attacks of asthma, headaches, nausea, palpitations and chest pains.

The "truth"

To date, no academic or governmental authority anywhere has ever warned people against MSG. It's not as if they haven't checked. Researchers have been looking for the fabled "Chinese Restaurant Syndrome", through dozens of studies, ever since a US doctor published an anecdotal report of his own supposed symptoms in 1968. Studies have even been carried out in which people believing themselves to be allergic to MSG have been fed unusually high doses of it, and still no evidence of a "syndrome" emerges. You won't often see glutamic acid named on ingredients lists these days; it shrinks from controversy under pseudonyms. But every day, millions of people all over the world eat glutamates, naturally occurring or added, which enhance the umami flavour of such foods as cheese, tomatoes, seaweed, yoghurt, and Marmite. One study suggests that an Italian meal is likely to provide considerably more MSG than a Chinese meal. But no one complains of Italian Restaurant Syndrome. In most non-Anglophone countries, MSG sensitivity is simply unheard of.

Sources

http://www.skepticalraptor.com/skepticalraptorblog.php/msg-myth-versus-science/; http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/05/dining/05glute.html?_r=3&pagewanted=1&th&emc=th&; http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2005/jul/10/foodanddrink.features3

Disclaimer

What makes the MSG story so interesting is that it must be one of the most debunked factoids on earth – yet you'll hardly meet anyone who doesn't believe it. Is there anything in it? If you have (non-anecdotal) evidence to debunk the debunking, then please write it on the back of a takeaway menu and send it to FT.

Update

In **FT157:28**, Mythchaser asked about news photographers using props, such as a child's shoe, to add poignancy to their disaster pics. In the digital age you don't even need your own props: a photo of a toddler's bloody shoe, taken in Israel in 2008, was widely recycled in social media reports of a 2014 terrorist attack in Pakistan (see www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-30498745).

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THE HAMPSTEAD WITCH HUNT

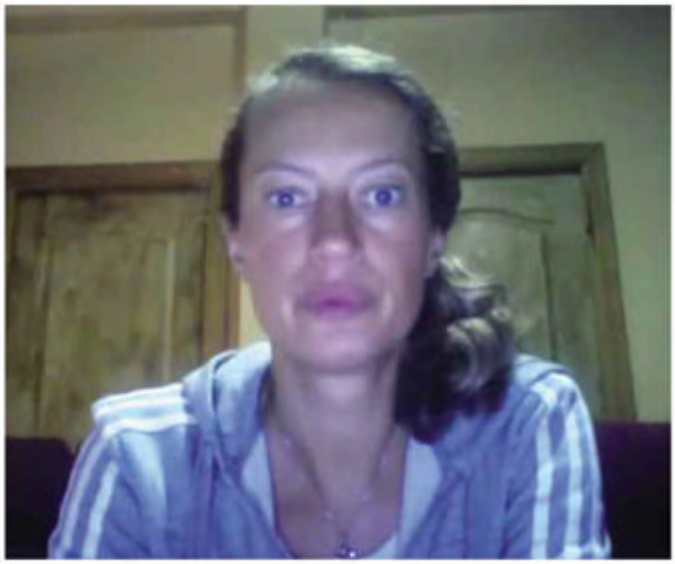
FEAR AND LOATHING IN NORTH LONDON AS "EVIL" WOMAN CREATES SATANIC PANIC

There's a disturbing whiff of Salem in the air of leafy, affluent Hampstead in north London. In a 22-page written ruling on care proceedings on 19 March, a High Court judge didn't mince her words. Ella Draper (right), she wrote, was an "evil" woman who had "tortured" and "brainwashed" her two young children into making claims that their father was the leader of a satanic cult that abused babies – claims that were "utter nonsense".

It's a story that demonstrates the chilling speed at which malicious gossip and unfounded allegations can spread online, masquerading as the truth. As the American writer Wallace Stegner (1909-93) put it: "Verifiable knowledge makes its way slowly, and only under cultivation, but fable has burrs and feet and claws and wings and an indestructible sheath like weed-seed, and can be carried almost anywhere and take root without benefit of soil or water."

In August 2014, a film clip of Draper's children – a boy and a girl, aged eight and nine – appeared online. In this they claimed that they, and many others, were abused by a satanic sex cult. They talked of scores of drugged babies being sent by courier services such as TNT and DHL to London from abroad to be sacrificed. Cult members were said to have drunk their victims' blood, danced around with the babies' skulls, and used their skin to make shoes. Their own father ('papa') was the leader. The short clip was one of 16 that were posted online. At least seven schools were named, a swimming pool identified as a meeting place and 'rituals' were alleged to have been performed at a McDonald's fast food restaurant.

In some clips, Draper speaks to the camera to identify other 'members' of the 100-strong satanic ring. She said the headmistress of Christ Church Primary School in Hampstead, which her children attended, "runs lucrative child pornography and a snuff movies business", and was in league with another teacher,



the local priest and dozens of local parents including company directors, advertising executives, small business owners, social workers, and a national TV reporter. Phone numbers, postal and email addresses were published next to their names. The videos and websites supporting these allegations have been viewed by more than four million people worldwide.

The claims are familiar from the litany of grotesque and preposterous accusations of "satanic ritual abuse" made by evangelical social workers and therapists against blameless adults in Cleveland, Nottingham, Rochdale, Kent, Manchester, the Orkney Islands and elsewhere from 1987 to the early 1990s – accusations comprehensively rubbished by Prof Jean La Fontaine in *Speak of the Devil* (1998). The seeds of the panic were planted with the 1980 publication of *Michelle Remembers*, the best-selling account of a Canadian psychotherapist's work with a woman named Michelle Smith, who, under his care, began recalling forgotten memories of horrific childhood sexual abuse at the hands of her mother and others who were part of a devil-worshipping cult. The book, though riddled with fantastical claims (for example, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the Archangel Michael healed Smith's physical scars), launched a cottage industry in recovering memories of satanic ritual abuse. (The psychotherapist and Smith later married.) In the US, victims of the frenzied modern witch-finders spent many years in jail before being exonerated.

Despite this sinister back story, the police nevertheless felt obliged to investigate the Hampstead calumnies in September last year. Draper's children took detectives on a tour of the neighbourhood in an attempt to pinpoint specific locations where the abuse was alleged to have occurred. The local church, for example, where some of the sickening practices were supposed to have taken place, was searched for incriminating material. Police were also deployed at Christ Church Primary School to reassure parents, who considered removing their children because they feared they were at risk.

Then the children, identified only as P and Q, admitted that they had been pressured by their mother and her lover, Abraham Christie, into making it all up. "Torture is the most accurate way to describe what was done by Mr Christie in collaboration with Ms Draper," wrote Mrs Justice Pauffley. "Both children were assaulted by Mr Christie by being hit with a metal spoon on multiple occasions over their head and legs, by being pushed into walls, punched, pinched and kicked. Water was poured over them as they knelt semi-clothed." Their fantasy accounts of abuse, said the judge, stemmed from "relentless emotional and psychological pressure as well as significant physical abuse" by Draper and Christie.

The aim of this lurid charade was to prevent the children's father, Ricky Dearman, 46, gaining custody. Mr Dearman – who, as well as having minor roles in a string of Hollywood films, has appeared in a prestigious production of Chekhov's *The Seagull* – met Draper in 2003. The couple separated three years later and had been involved in a custody battle over the children – that was his only 'crime'. The allegations against him, and all the others named as 'abusers', were utterly baseless; but the names of those individuals are still circulating online. Draper's supporters have continued to upload the defamatory material on the Internet in defiance of court injunctions. One of Draper's victims, a Hampstead mother who works in advertising, said: "This woman [Draper] has made our lives a living hell. I am one of the people named online. Since all this started, I have been receiving unbelievably hateful emails every week, saying things such as 'Your days are numbered' and calling me 'paedophile scum'." Another victim said: "It's totally destroyed our lives. I've had abusive phone calls and people saying they want to hang us on Hampstead Heath. My mother's suffered a complete breakdown and won't leave the house."

At morning service at the church attached to Christ Church Primary School on Sunday, 22 March, parishioners were confronted by a mob of between 20 and 30 of Draper's supporters, who hurled abuse at them and held up their mobile phones to film them as they arrived. "Paedophiles!" screamed one of the protesters. The group was eventually moved on by the police, but didn't give up. "The loonies are outside the

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church just down the road again for the second Sunday in a row," wrote David Aaronovich in the *Times* (30 March).

Originally from Rostov in southern Russia, Ella Draper – or Ella Gareeva as she then was – attended Moscow State University, where she graduated with a masters degree in history of art. It was in Moscow in the Nineties that she met a British banker who would become her first husband. She became pregnant and moved to Britain around 17 years ago to raise their son; he still lives with his father in the Home Counties. The marriage eventually ended, but she kept her married name and in 2003 met Mr Dearman, with whom she had two children before separating acrimoniously in 2006. Teaching yoga and giving "lifestyle advice" to local "yummy mummies", Draper acquired an extensive clientele in north London. In May 2014 she shacked up with Abraham Christie, a self-styled "nutritionist" with a criminal record including offences for violence, dishonesty and possessing controlled drugs.

Draper, 42, has fled abroad, probably to Russia. Her children remain in care, and their father sees them once a week. On 21 March she posted another video 'witness statement' online, repeating false claims of "rape, sodomy, murder and cannibalism" against exonerated individuals. She says she was "driven out of the UK under threat of kidnap or worse" and accuses Mrs Justice Pauffley of "treason". A woman who had all her contact details and those of her child posted online said: "It really does beggar belief and adds insult to injury that even after the detailed court judgment Draper still has the audacity to be fuelling the fire by repeating false allegations against us all. There are more and more vigilantes coming on board instead of this dying down. I was given a panic alarm by the police six or seven weeks ago and am enquiring about a fire-proof letterbox." The police have said Draper, Christie, and Draper's supporter Sabine McNeill will be arrested – if they can be found. *slate.com, 7 Jan 2014; Hampstead & Highgate Express, 20+26 Mar; dailymail.co.uk, 20+23+27 Mar; Sun, 20 Mar 2015.* For in-depth reports on the original satanic ritual abuse hysteria in the UK, see **FT57:46-62**.

FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

FAIRY HURLERS

Most of our best sources for local fairylore in Britain and Ireland date to the 19th century. Yes, very, very occasionally a trawl through the writings of earlier centuries brings something to light, but these earlier sources are, all too often, incidental or full of generalities. This is why this passage from an English continuation of the *History of the World* by Dionisius Petavius (1659), relating to Boscastle in northern Cornwall, is so exciting: "...a strange Apparition in Cornwall in the West of England, about the moneth [sic] of August, 1657; it was of Hurlers, as they are there called; and were seen by many in a field of standing Corn, about Bose Castle; they being innumerable, and in white apparrel; and at last they hurled themselves into the Sea. Some of the Spectators going afterwards into the field, found the Corn no whit damnified; contrary to their expectation."

> AT THIS DATE, HURLING WAS THE COUNTY GAME OF CORNWALL, AND ONE ATTESTED IN THE SOUTH-WEST FROM ABOUT 1600

Now hold on, you might be saying, where are the fairies? One of the challenges of finding fairies in pre-19th century sources is that they often travel under different names: spirits (in the 17th century) and demons (in the Middle Ages). But hurlers?

The reference, of course, is to the game of hurling: at this date the county game of Cornwall, and one attested in the south-west from about 1600, though probably much older. But here, if anything, incredulity mounts. Fairy hurlers?

Well, there are four points that suggest fairies or perhaps piskeys (the usual 19th-century term for Cornish fairy folk). First, the hurlers are described as "innumerable", a word often used with fairies. Second, they are all wearing white: fairies are said to have uniform clothes and white is one of the early modern fairy colours (along with green, red and black). Third, there is a tradition in Ireland that fairy factions fight or play hurling – an extremely violent game – to settle their disputes: and Irish and Cornish fairylore often overlap. Fourth, fairy battles or games frequently end with eye-witnesses remarking on how, despite the violence of the battle or game, once the fairies disappear, there is no trace of them ever having been there: in the words of the English continuator of Petavius the surroundings are "no whit damnified".

These four points all suggest that in this peculiar little account we have our earliest Cornish fairy sighting, a generation before Anne Jefferies's fairy visions were published by Moses Pitt.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

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FLYINGSAUCERY

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SAUL LOEB / AFP GETTY IMAGES

WHO'S ZOOMING WHO?

It's something of a sport among journalists to prod politicians with the flying saucer stick, because whatever they say makes good press. Deny knowledge of UFOs and that's evidence of the worldwide UFO cover-up. Be foolish enough to speculate what might or might not be 'out there', and, well, that's immediately headline news and proof that politicians know more than they're letting on.

US talk show host Jimmy Kimmel is no stranger to this game and last year probed former President Bill Clinton about UFOs and aliens allegedly concealed at Area 51 in Nevada. Did Clinton know what was going on? "Sort of" was his less than definitive response. Kimmel tried his luck again this year, this time with Barack Obama, who clearly understood the game and was willing to play. Kimmel opened with "If I was the president... I would immediately race to wherever they have the files about Area 51 and UFOs, and I'd go through everything to find out what happened. Did you do that?" Obama retorted with: "That's why you will not be president, because that's the first thing that you would do." Which could, of course be interpreted as, well, anything you like. Later in their conversation Obama quipped: "The aliens won't let it happen. You'd reveal all their secrets, and they exercise strict control over us... I can't reveal anything." Would that be because he has nothing to reveal? Or, as he laughingly suggested to Kimmel it's because "...that's what we're instructed to say"?

www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/15/ufos-obama-kimmel_n_6863142.html

THE 'MISSING' FILES

Last year (**FT317:26**) we reported that Britain's Ministry of Defence had found a further 18 UFO files after the official end of its release programme involving The National Archives. These miscellaneous papers were being prepared for release this year. This news came as no surprise to us. Anyone with even a basic knowledge of how the civil service works knows that governments constantly lose and 'misplace' files. We learned that record keeping in the MoD and other large departments was, and in some cases still is, abysmal. Heaping irony upon this merry-go-round, we used FOI to obtain complete copies of some of these 'missing' files nearly a decade ago (**FT189:30**). Spoiler alert: they contain no smoking gun. Some are duplicates of UFO papers released earlier by The National Archives. One has the thrilling title 'Copyright issues concerning Internet publication of UFO reports'. A few contain intelligence papers generated during the MoD's Condign project (**FT211:4-6**) but tell us nothing we don't already know. Despite the dull content, former UFO desk jockey Nick Pope is busy stirring the pot to keep the idea of a 'British X-Files' project alive. The massive delay "will have conspiracy theorists up in arms", he says, whilst carefully excluding himself from such dubious company. Why the delay? Pope suspects "there's a bombshell in these files and the Ministry does not know how to handle it".

What type of bombshell? Former USAF airman John Burroughs thinks he knows. He claims the US government recently settled his injury claim "on the basis of a UK government admission that the Rendlesham witnesses were probably irradiated". According to him, the files "almost certainly contain further documents on the incident"; and he goes further, suggesting the delay has been caused by "a high-level diplomatic row". We predict that when the 'missing files' are released they will contain no significant new evidence about the Rendlesham incident. Neither will there be any admission that *anyone* was exposed to radiation as a result of it. The author of the Condign report might have believed that Burroughs was exposed to radiation from a UAP. But his ideas about atmospheric plasmas were based upon material absorbed from the UFO literature, not from secret knowledge held by the MoD. The conspiracy theorists – and Nick Pope – will respond to this lack of evidence by dismissing these 'missing files' as being part of the cover-up. Claims will be made about further Top Secret files squirrelled away somewhere else and the familiar circular arguments will continue. Remember, you read it here first folks!

D.Mirror, 1 April 2015.

JAPAN NOT ON ALIEN TOURIST A-LIST

Japanese military aircraft have never found any evidence of UFOs "believed to have come over from anywhere other than Earth", according to a statement made by the country's Defence Minister in April. Gen Nakatani made the statement in response to a question from a more flamboyant member of the Japanese Diet, Antonio Inoki (pictured below), who asked if aircraft had ever been sent to intercept alien craft and "whether studies are going on". Inoki said he did not know if aliens existed but he had once seen a UFO rocket into the air and disappear over the horizon. Nakatani said the Air Self Defence Force occasionally sent aircraft to identify objects in Japanese air space, but – much like the RAF's experience – these had always turned out to be birds, aircraft or unusual atmospheric phenomena. This type of unequivocal denial must either be true or false. But regardless of the facts, those who want to believe in a cover-up will always find reasons to continue believing. When UFOs were last debated in the Japanese parliament in 2007, the chief cabinet secretary provoked laughter from journalists when he announced: "Personally, I absolutely believe they exist". He may have been joking but, as usual, no evidence is forthcoming.

Japan Times, 2 April.

YOSHIKAZU TSUNO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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BRITISH **JENNY RANDLES** RE-OPENS THE CASE FILES ON BRITAIN'S BEST-KNOWN UFO ABDUCTION

FLAPPY VALLEY, PART 3

The first two parts of this report revealed a sighting by a new witness – Bob, the driver of a bus going down Burnley Road, Todmorden, just before 5am on 29 November 1980. His account coincides with the famous UFO encounter that night when West Yorkshire policeman Alan Godfrey drove his patrol car towards a rotating object above the same highway. After a previous FT article (**FT269:44-47+270:46-49**) theorised that Alan could have misperceived an untraced bus, I endeavoured to see if this new testimony from a real bus driver matches that theory. However, the patrol car and bus were seemingly never located together on Burnley Road.

Crucially, both Alan and Bob report the same features of an unusual rotating whirlwind that spun debris across the road and left a circular swirl on the previously wet surface. So *something* physically real was over that road around 5am. I asked Bob if he thought that Alan might have mistaken the bus Bob was driving for a later one. He thought not, and explained why: "After those first service buses, the road got busy with work traffic. And from behind at that point Alan would just see two bus windows, not the five he reported. No other driver at the garage ever mentioned seeing anything. And to me it really was something strange."

Alan also described to me in detail what happened: "I saw a diamond-shaped object hovering 5ft [1.5m] off the ground with darkened windows or panelling around the top half. It was 20ft [6m] wide and 14ft [4.3m] high. It was completely silent. There were lots of leaves and twigs flying around in a whirlwind kind of fashion. I had the blue flashing lights on and the warning flashers as well. The headlights of the car were bouncing back off the object, I was that close... Both radios were dead. I couldn't get any response from headquarters. I started to sketch the object when there was a very large white flash of light many times brighter than a photo flash bulb. It blinded me. When the blindness went I found that I was further up the road and the object had gone. That's it for my conscious memory."

Months later, via hypnosis experiments, he added a classic 'alien abduction' story of being medically probed by a bearded man called 'Yosef' alongside robot-like entities. What do we make of this? Alan says: "The hypnosis version is just what it is. It could be a true account of what happened or a combination of a conscious memory mixed up with other fictitious memories. Who knows which is the real thing, because I don't." Alan told me that after his sighting but *before* the regression he read some UFO and science fiction material out of curiosity, and accepts this could have influenced those results. Because of this, I feel we should judge this case on the conscious recall alone and not the contentious and (as even Alan accepts) unverifiable add-ons provided under hypnosis.

So does Alan think that the object he saw could have been Bob's bus in a whirlwind?

"The bus theory is so full of holes that it is laughable. For this to work the bus would have had to be sideways across the carriageway for me to see five upper deck windows."

JENNY RANDLES

ABOVE: A photo showing damage to PC Godfrey's police boot – a long split, as if it had been dragged sideways.

Bob confirmed to me that he did not park sideways, though Burnley Road is on a slight bend here and a parked bus *might* reveal a partial side-on view from behind. So could Alan have encountered a *different* bus, one other than Bob's? Alan says: "The object spanned the full road width. If any service bus leaving town had gone sideways across the road and I had come up to it with my blue flashing lights ablaze I am bloody sure the driver would have got out and come over to me to explain why it was in that position completely blocking the road." In addition, he reminds me that on his return to the police station he had a wound on his foot and his sturdy police boot had a long split as if dragged sideways. My photo (above) shows this damage.

These are strong arguments, but Alan has another reason for being sure he did not see a West Yorkshire bus that Bob or someone else was driving: "Just before I became a police officer for five years I had worked as a bus driver from that Todmorden depot. I drove the very buses that I supposedly mistook. I know what these looked like. They were also brightly coloured. I would have recognised one."

We should now look at the vortex – the one thing that both men witnessed. There seem to be two options. It was either being created by a hovering UFO, which Alan saw but Bob did not, or it was an atmospheric phenomenon. So could the weather have created such an odd looking vortex? The heavy rain that both men reported earlier that night came from a departing Arctic air stream from the east producing cold temperatures (it was 2°C that night). This air cleared away just before the sighting and an intense anticyclone arrived from the northwest. The passage of a frontal system has been linked with the appearance of atmospheric vortices such as tornadoes. The rest of that weekend was dry and clear. In fact, Birmingham recorded a then record high barometric pressure of 1046 Mb next day. Modest tornadoes happen in the UK: about 30 are reported every year. Tornadoes, however, are not stationary for long nor do they usually recur quickly in the same spot. Their path of destruction would also be obvious. So this seems a most unusual sort of vortex. The upward suction described by Bob matches a dust devil, in which warm air at ground level rises and twists. However, these are driven by heat and so usually occur in summer – though clashing frontal systems might provoke something related.

An eddy whirlwind has similarities, involving two frontal systems and geographical locations such as a valley beside a hill. Similar weather phenomena inspired Terence Meaden, the editor of the *Journal of Meteorology*, to propose a solution to the crop circle mystery that also began in 1980. He saw it as a most likely natural cause for simple, swirled circles found in crop fields formed during the early hours.

The crop circle phenomenon quickly escalated as hoaxers fabricated all manner of geometric patterns very obviously not caused by the weather. Misguided attempts to find a scientific way to incorporate such complexity damaged the original theory for basic circular swirls. But that first concept was scientifically sound and has support from records of circles discovered long before the mass media, widespread hoaxing and UFOs came together to generate a myth.

Of course, in Todmorden air pressure from any vortex could not flatten a solid road surface but could temporarily swirl water on top. Such crop circle-like phenomena have been recorded in environments such as grass, sand and snow, where they are inevitably transient. Cereal crops may simply show the same process in a medium that affords more permanence.

Clashing weather systems and the local geography of the Calder valley do fit the possibility that a rare, nocturnal stationary whirlwind could form. Were these men just in the right place at the right time to witness it? However, Alan saw it plus the effects it created, while Bob saw only the effects. If the UFO *was* the vortex, then how could that make sense? As so often in this investigation, we face the choice of whether to tweak the facts (such as those misfit timings) to match a neat natural solution (bus inside an unexpected whirlwind) or accept what the facts say and tweak the natural phenomenon that both men may have seen. Perhaps this natural vortex was an unidentified atmospheric phenomenon (UAP) capable of resolving all that was reported, while a whirlwind or a bus inside one is not. Either way, you choose what is most likely to be true.

Next month, I will test the scenario of a UAP to see if it holds up here. If you have reached a conclusion from the data so far, then that new evidence just might make you reconsider.

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HARBINGER GHOSTS

You're sitting up late waiting for your husband, when at long last you hear his footsteps outside. He turns the key in the lock, opens the door, enters the hall and walks upstairs. You call after him to ask if he's OK... and there's no one there. You just had a visit from a vardøger, the friendly ghost of the Nordic countries, as **NILS ERIK GRANDE** explains...

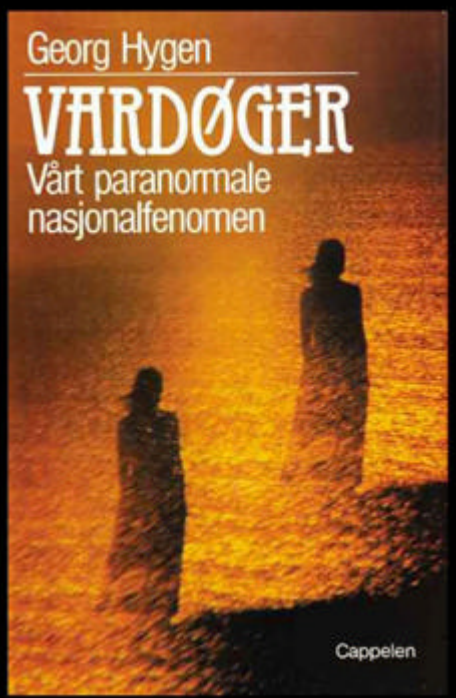
The particularly Nordic phenomenon known as *fylgja* in Iceland and *vardøger* in Norway has been mentioned in passing several times in the pages of *FT*, but it has never been covered in a separate article. Since it has several unique features, it deserves to be better known outside its usual haunts – if you'll pardon the expression.

As a Norwegian, it is natural for me to use the term 'vardøger' rather than 'fylgja'. According to some sources, the two phenomena may not be exactly analogous, but a discussion of the possible differences is outside the scope of this short piece.

I should mention that I have never had a vardøger experience myself, and I hadn't even heard about the phenomenon until I was about 17. This shouldn't be too surprising. as my father was the principal of the local school, and people wouldn't readily discuss such things with the schoolmaster or his family.

The definitive treatise on the phenomenon is *Vardøger, vårt paranormale nasjonalfenomen* ('Vardøger, our paranormal national phenomenon') by Georg Hygen. [1] At a mere 100 pages, it is a slim volume, but nonetheless a true fortean classic and the main source on which I have drawn.

The main part of the book consists of first-person accounts from informants scattered all over Norway. The material was gleaned from a body of 475 letters received by the Norwegian Society for Parapsychology in the early 1980s after an appeal in the national media asking people to write in about their paranormal experiences in general. Some accounts from earlier printed sources are also included.



LEFT: Georg Hygen's book 'Vardøger, our paranormal national phenomenon'.

UNLIKE GHOSTS, THEY ARE SELDOM PERCEIVED AS FRIGHTENING OR THREATENING

It is important to understand that Professor Hygen, an internationally renowned scientist with his critical faculties in good working order, regarded vardøger as an objectively real phenomenon. His book is not a sociological survey, but an attempt at documentation and classification of unknown forces in the human mind.

MUNDANE GHOSTS

he vardøger phenomenon itself is easily described. A person is heard approaching and entering a house, usually their home. The listener(s) can clearly follow the person's progress outside and inside the house, until the sounds suddenly stop. On closer inspection, nobody has entered, and there is no evidence of anyone having been outside. If it's winter and snowing, which, in Norway, it will be for several months each year, this is pretty easy to check.

Some time afterwards – typically 15 to 20 minutes – the sequence of approaching sounds will repeat, and this time the person actually appears. This is the defining characteristic of the phenomenon – the vardøger *signals* the coming of the person.

Unlike ghosts, vardøger are seldom perceived as frightening or threatening. Sometimes, children or unprepared persons can find the experience unsettling when they encounter it for the first time, but no informants describe the phenomenon as malevolent or negative. The very mundanity of the sounds, and the connection to someone known or loved, seem to make

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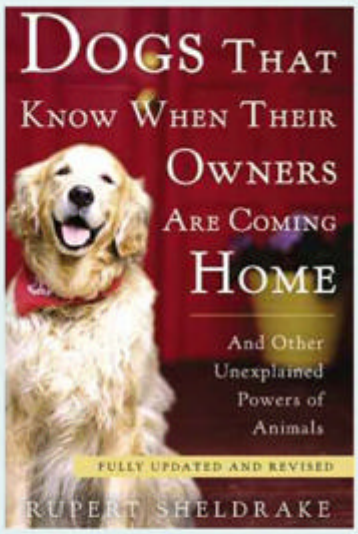

THE SHELDRAKE CONNECTION

It seems natural to compare vardøger with the alleged ability of pets to know when their owners are returning. This has been discussed in several books and articles by Rupert Sheldrake, such as *Seven Experiments That Could Change the World* (1994) and *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home* (1999).

Sheldrake's animal cases are amazingly similar to the standard vardøger experience. The pets display the same behaviour over long periods of time; they sense their owners' return even if they arrive at irregular times; and they seemingly react to the owners' actual leaving for home, or their intention to do so. It is impossible to know if the animals 'hear' their owners, but if Hygen's telepathic theory of vardøger is correct, such communication should be able to trigger any kind of sensory hallucination. Both hearing and smelling would work for dogs, of course; then again, the telepathic bond might function without any attendant sense cues.

A very curious fact is that Hygen and his informants make no mention of animals at all. Several informants were farmers and would certainly have kept both dogs and cats, but they do not figure in any of the cases in the book. This could of course be an editorial decision by the author, but even then I'd expect him to make some allusion to it. It's more likely that the cultural perception of vardøger is centred on people rather than animals – or that Norwegian pets are woefully un-telepathic. As far as I know, Sheldrake for his part doesn't give any examples of people having this ability. This could again be an editorial decision or a cultural perception, but we are left with the strange implication that this is an ability that resides in people in the Nordic countries and in animals in the English-speaking world.

it friendly and reassuring. It is commonly believed that "only good people can hear the vardøger", as two informants independently state.

The typical vardøger will also be a constant visitor, not a one-off or sporadic happening. Several wives tell how they would habitually put the kettle on or start preparing dinner on hearing the vardøger, in the certain knowledge that their husband would follow in a short while. [2] This would of course be no great feat if he were working regular hours. However, most of these cases concern people who, for different reasons, would arrive unexpectedly or at irregular times.

My father was a country doctor up north, in a district that had no motor roads. We often heard his sleigh bells as we sat waiting around the paraffin lamp. The front door would open, we heard his footsteps and he would put his walking stick away. And then, nothing. Fifteen minutes later the sounds would repeat, and then he actually arrived. (p62)

Hygen's accounts are all pre-1980, some dating back as far as the early 1900s, so the traditional pattern of housewives with working husbands was predominant. In fact, nearly 60 per cent of the cases in the book concern the vardøger of fathers, brothers, sons, uncles or grandfathers, with another 10 per cent concerning unrelated males. About 15 per cent concern female family members (wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt) and 10 per cent unrelated females. The remaining cases concern married couples and unspecified groups of people. The nature of the material makes it difficult to give exact percentages, but men figure in nearly three times as many cases as women. It's impossible to know if this is a reporting bias or a real gender difference.

AUDITORY HAUNTINGS

Vardøger is almost exclusively an *auditory* experience. A few informants claim to have seen as well as heard the approaching person, but this is atypical, and such cases may perhaps have more in common with apparitions or doppelgängers – not that anyone knows what *they* are.

The sounds made by vardøger differ radically from the sounds reportedly made by poltergeists or traditional ghosts (or the usual sounds heard in old houses, for that matter).

Firstly, they are very clear and well-defined: footsteps, jangling of keys, turning of door handles, slamming of doors, creaking of floorboards. Many informants describe hearing approaching cars or bicycles before the vardøger enters, or the sound of walking up the stairs, turning on the light, or putting logs on the fire after coming into the house.

Secondly, they are specific to the person arriving: a particular footfall, a characteristic clearing of the throat, a typical way of brushing snow off the shoes. A grandfather

FOOTSTEPS, THE JANGLING OF KEYS, TURNING OF DOOR HANDLES, CREAKING OF FLOORBOARDS

VILDEINDREHUS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The accounts of vardøger collected by Georg Hygen all predate the 1980s, often took place in rural locations and, he theorised, depended on an undistracted stare of mind. Are the vardøger still heard today?

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has a habitual way of stomping with his ivory-handled walking stick, and so on.

Thirdly, they occur in the correct, logical sequence. In almost all cases, informants claim that the arrival of the actual person produces the exact same sounds they heard earlier.

We girls slept on the first floor. It was always in the evenings we would hear the vardøger. We used to store our bicycles in an outhouse, with a funny old lock that would screech when the key was turned. My sister would often go out while I stayed home, and I heard the lock many times, followed by footsteps on the stairs and along the corridor. Then nothing - until the exact same things happened again some time later. (p33)

WARNING SPIRITS

The name 'vardøger' comes from the old Norse 'vard-hugr', meaning 'warning spirit' or 'warning thought'. The phenomenon is also sometimes called 'førebud' (literally 'fore-boding', or more accurately 'harbinger'). The Icelandic term 'fylgja', which may also be used in some Norwegian dialects, means 'follower' or 'fellow-traveller'. Even so, it is commonly agreed that vardøger is an *attribute* of certain persons – it is an ability they have to project themselves, as it were, not a separate ghostly entity.

I heard my brother's vardøger countless times. I heard him enter the hall and walk up the stairs. Upstairs I heard him open the door and close it again. Then there were no more sounds until he actually arrived 10-15 minutes later. I often wondered why I never heard anything like it when my husband came home." (p31)

Hygen tentatively explains vardøger as a form of telepathic communication that sets up auditory hallucinations in the minds of the recipients. Several informants with vardøger claim that thinking about their family, or thinking about going home, triggers the phenomenon.

If I return home later than intended, and then think 'I should have been home by now', the people at home will usually hear me arriving quite clearly. (p16)

One informant [3] even claimed he would sometimes have a *double* vardøger, a 'strong' one that corresponded with his intention of returning home, and a 'weak' one that corresponded with his actual setting off.

Many cases concern people hearing their spouses, or children hearing their parents – individuals who would naturally have a strong emotional bond. In several accounts, guests sitting with family members also hear the vardøger, and have to be told that the person has this ability. Since several people may hear the same sounds, Hygen speculates that the auditory hallucination must be collective. It's by no means certain that everyone present will hear it, though – some persons may be more sensitive than others.

Curiously enough, this is not the least bit scary, but the rest of my family have been sceptical – until one day when I was waiting for my husband together with my grown-up son. I heard the usual sounds, but said nothing. My son looked at me, and said: 'Now I heard it too!' (p82)

Hygen also theorises that the ability to hear the vardøger depends on an undistracted, relaxed state of mind. This can be inferred by many of the accounts in the book. Most of them took place long enough ago that the modern onslaught on the senses had not yet started; often, the settings for vardøger experiences would be in quiet, rural places. [4]

These days, even the remotest rural areas have good roads, TV, mobiles and the Internet, and many young people will be permanently hooked up to their personal stereos, phones or tablets. Therefore, one would expect the vardøger experience to become rarer, if it has not vanished altogether. I am not aware of any contemporary studies of the phenomenon, but it would be interesting to see if the relatively short period between 1987 and today had seen a marked decrease in its occurrence. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

NILS ERIK GRANDE is a computer programmer with a lifelong interest in forteana. He has seen UFOs twice, heard a ghost once, and encounters Jungian coincidence wherever he turns. He is an avid collector of obscure old books that can be picked up for a song at jumble sales, and has lately developed an unhealthy interest in forgotten Prog bands. A resident of Oslo, Norway, he spends his holidays in Britain and can usually be found at the bar.

NOTES

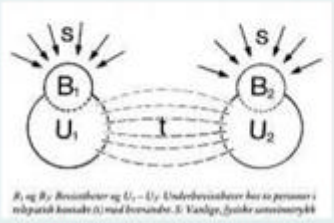
1 *Vardøger, vårt paranormale nasjonalfenomen*, Cappelen, 1987 (ISBN 8202111900).

2 British readers should note that when Norwegians put the kettle on, it's usually for coffee, not tea. These days, it'll be an espresso machine or a cappuccino maker.

3 The informant in question was Dr Thorstein Wereide (1882-1969), a university lecturer in physics who was also a gifted painter and a prominent member of the Norwegian Society for Parapsychology. His testimonial is taken from his 1955 book *Menneskets metafysikk* ('The Metaphysics of Man'), which devotes 15 pages to vardøger and related phenomena. He didn't become aware of his own vardøger until 1925, when he married a woman with psychic abilities. In case you're wondering about the 'Were' part of his surname, it has no paranormal connections.

4 On the other hand, several informants were living in city flats. One had even emigrated to Brooklyn, of all places, and projected his vardøger from a subway train (p95).

GEORG HYGEN AND THE NORWEGIAN SOCIETY FOR PARAPSYCHOLOGY



Georg Hygen (1908-1994) was a professor of botany at the Norwegian Agricultural University. Lest this create the impression that he was some sort of country bumpkin dabbling in the occult, it should be emphasised that he was one of Norway's foremost intellectuals throughout his long life.

Apart from being an important force in the development of modern Norwegian universities, he had a wide range of interests and participated in wider social and political debate. Ardently opposed to fluoridation of the water supply in the 1960s, he was probably instrumental in preventing this.

Hygen was interested in the paranormal from the standpoint of the rational scientist, and enthusiastically promoted the objective, scientific study of unexplained phenomena. He was chairman of the Norwegian Society for Parapsychology (Norsk Parapsykologisk Selskap) between 1955 and 1963 and again from 1992-93. This society was directly modelled on the British Society for Psychical Research and counted many prominent intellectuals as members, notably Harald Schjelderup (1895-1974), a double professor of philosophy and psychology who authored a classic text of psychic phenomena, *Det skjulte menneske* ('Hidden Man').

TOP: Hygen's diagram of how telepathy works: B = Ordinary consciousness (Bevissthet) U = The Subconscious (Underbevissthet) S = Ordinary sensory output (Sanseinntrykk) t = Telepathic contact. **ABOVE:** A bust of Hygen by sculptor Solveyg Schaefferer.

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UNLOCKING THE CAGE

What has been described as "the most haunted house in England" is up for sale after scaring off its owner, who then opened it up to paranormal investigators. Ghost hunter **JOHN FRASER** tells the story, and wonders what's next for Essex's haunted prison.

Two bedrooms, one bathroom cottage, constructed in approximately 1800 and features one reception room. Small enclosed courtyard garden… The Cage in St Osyth is one of England's most haunted houses… and comes set up to accommodate a paranormal business if the new owner requires. Contact branch for relevant Energy Performance Certificate.

So read a recent property description from a Clacton-on-Sea estate agent. Nearly five years earlier, in 2010, I had received an email from Vanessa Mitchell, the owner of the property in question, asking for advice. Her tenants were leaving the cottage in the village of St Osyth, Essex, and she was reluctant to rent it out again, believing that the level of apparent paranormal activity made it unfair on any prospective new inhabitants.

When I and my colleague Rosie O'Carroll visited Mitchell shortly after, we were initially surprised when she asked – in all sincerity – if it was feasible to rent out the house to paranormal research groups on an ongoing basis. Mitchell explained: she was definitely not going back to live there herself, and she no longer thought tenants a viable option – so what other use could the house be put to? On reflection, her logic was sound on this point; she was also right to ignore my advice that only one or two groups would be likely to take her up on such a proposition. What followed over the next four years was a level of investigation – including, ultimately, excavations – similar in some ways to the investigations of Borley Rectory when its permanent (human) residents left in the late 1930s, or to Chingle Hall, which was opened to investigation throughout most of the 1990s.

THE CAGE IS A PROPERTY STEEPED IN HISTORY AND A STRONG ELEMENT OF SUFFERING

FORCED TO QUIT HOME BY GHOSTS

Mum flees clutching baby

By MIRANDA PRYNNE

A FRANTIC mum fled her dream cottage clutching her baby son — after finding twelve GHOSTS there.

Terrified Vanessa Mitchell, 27, told how weeks after moving in the spooks started

Smuckily HITTING her from behind, PULLING her hair and trying to SHOVE visitors down the stairs. They also invisibly MOVED objects

Haunted house . . . the former jail

BONES IN THE WITCH HOUSE

Vanessa Mitchell purchased The Cage in 2005 when she returned to her hometown from Newcastle. She was interested in the history of the place. Parts of the building date back far beyond 1800 and were used as the village's holding cell up to 1908, giving the property its name. Of particular interest was its use in 1582 to imprison 14 women accused of witchcraft. The most famous of these was the herbalist and midwife Ursula Kemp, whose feud with a local family probably ultimately sealed her fate. Clemency was shown to most of the so-called witches, but both Kemp and a woman called Elizabeth Bennet were hanged. It is debatable whether skeletons found in 1921, in the garden of a different nearby property, were those of these unfortunate ladies, although both skeletons had iron rivets through their elbows and knees, thought to prevent witches rising from the grave.

So the Cage was certainly a property steeped in history and a strong element of suffering, and it also had a reputation for being sold on far more often than other similar properties. Strangely, just prior to moving in, Mitchell had a reading with a medium who apparently described her new house correctly and who also made a strange comment about the house "choosing her" – rather than the other way round – as its owner.

On virtually her first day in her new home, Mitchell saw what she thought was the shadow of a man passing by her. Stranger things followed, such as the movement of objects and the opening by themselves of doors with lift-up latches. Perhaps the strangest event of this early stage was the appearance in the cottage's kitchen of the death certificate of one of the house's previous owners, who had apparently committed suicide.

At this point, Mitchell was sharing the house with friends, so the events, while disconcerting, were tolerable; the fact that the friends were also having odd experiences made for a sort of shared bravado. However, after her friends moved out and Mitchell and her young child were

PHOTOS: JOHN FRASER

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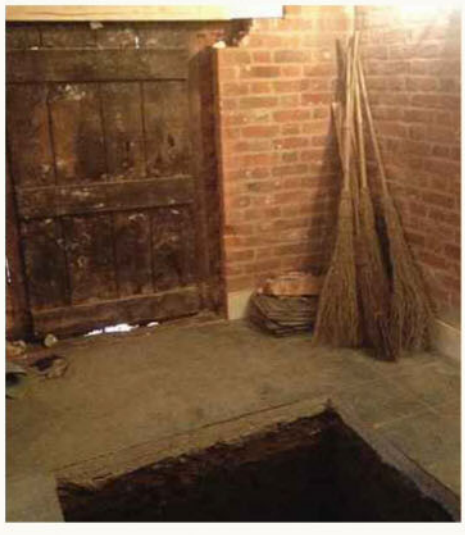
the Cage
Mediaeval prison
St.Osyth Resident Ursula Kemp
was imprisoned here before being
hanged as a witch in 1582.
It was last used in 1908.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: An exterior view of The Cage; a plaque commemorating the imprisonment and hanging of suspected witch Ursula Kemp; excavations inside the house; the property's owner, Vanessa Mitchell.

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left alone in the house, the phenomena became increasingly frightening. One particularly strange incident happened when two friends from the Salvation Army came round for a cup of coffee. They had passed through the hall to the front room to sit down, but on going back through the same hall found very obvious spatters of blood on the floor. The eventual tipping point came with the appearance of an apparition of a man in modern-day clothes standing near to where her child was sleeping – at which point Mitchell decided The Cage could no longer be used as a family home.

After just three years, Mitchell moved out and rented The Cage to tenants. However, none of them lasted long and would complain of rattling door latches and other related phenomena. One previous tenant, John Chapman, was quoted later in the *Daily Mail* as saying: "I didn't believe in ghosts, but one night I was alone in the house and I heard footsteps climbing the stairs to my bedroom… Then I saw the door handle actually turning – yet I knew there was no one there. After that, I left." [2]

INVESTIGATING THE CAGE

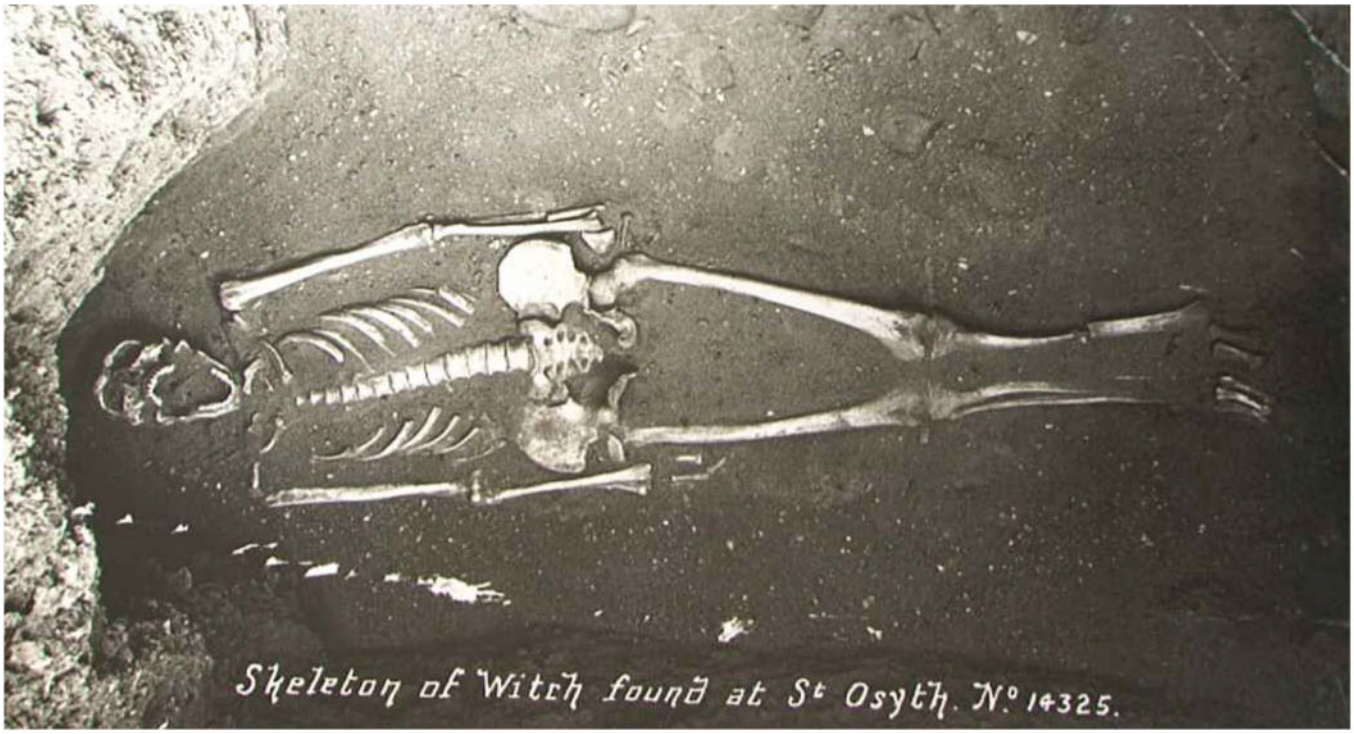
Which brings us back to 2010, when Vanessa Mitchell made the decision to rent the house out for paranormal study. This got coverage in the press in the usual sensationalist manner, the London *Metro* running a headline stating 'Brave mother runs ghost tours around her haunted home to make ends meet',[3] while the *Sun* sent a female reporter there for the night and stated that she left terrified. Over the next few years, many paranormal research groups did take up Mitchell's offer, including the venerable Ghost Club, one of the oldest of all.

The phenomena happening during this period included inexplicable bangs, people being pushed and apparently slapped, and various entities being picked up by differing means of spirit communication. Later phenomena also included an audible, animal-like growl. In some ways, though, it was unfortunate that during this period there was no one particular organisation trying to in some way join up all the reports (many of the individual ones can be found online). However, what did gradually happen was that it became possible to investigate The Cage in a very sophisticated way, with CCTV in each room and a big wall of monitors making the kitchen partly resemble a hi-tech control centre.

"I SAW THE DOOR HANDLE TURNING -YET I KNEW THERE WAS NO ONE THERE. AFTER THAT, I LEFT"

In the autumn of 2014 it was decided to dig under the floorboards, where it was rumoured that people had been buried. No human remains were found, but an interesting collection of animal bones were dug up, along with some other historical items such as pipes. At the time of writing, the bones have not been identified. The excavations also included the reopening of a bricked-up ancient door, which would have been the original entrance when the house was used as a holding prison.

One thing that became clear from the accounts of both tenants and investigators was that neither of the dead witches – Ursula Kemp and Elizabeth Bennet – seemed to be the source of any of the phenomena. They were, in any case, executed in Chelmsford and spent just a number of months captive in St Osyth. Mitchell originally identified three ghosts – one female and two males, one of which (the one in modern dress mentioned previously) was felt to be more oppressive. Mitchell's young child's toys in the second bedroom were also for a time the source of what might have been poltergeist phenomena; and, strangely, a very old photograph of unknown origin, showing a young boy in a sailor suit, was found under the staircase. This led to speculation that the



ABOVE: One of the skeletons unearthed in a nearby house in 1921. They were identified, without any real evidence, as being the remains of accused witches Ursula Kemp and Elizabeth Bennet and remained a macabre local tourist attraction for many years before being moved to the Museum of Witchcraft in Boscastle in the 1960s.
ABOVE: Some of the bones uncovered during recent excavations beneath The Cage – none of them have turned out to be human.

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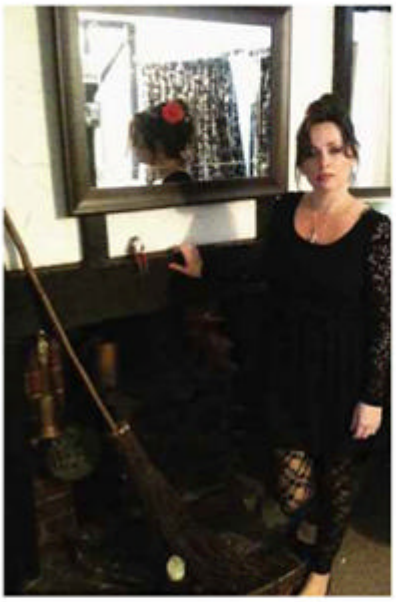

PHOTOS: JOHN FRASER

ABOVE LEFT: Digging under the floor of the house. **ABOVE CENTRE:** The photographic portrait of a young boy found under the staircase. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Vanessa Mitchell.

boy (whoever he is) might be responsible for some of the more childlike phenomena. A whole series of similar old photos and objects found on the premises undoubtedly gave The Cage a certain spooky, 'should-be-haunted' atmosphere.

In such instances, when a house has a spooky feeling combined with reputation for being haunted, paranormal groups need to take great care when analysing certain kinds of subjective evidence. The psychologist R P Bentall in his paper "The Illusion Of reality" [4] has suggested that the expectation of seeing something can cause people to experience ghost-type hallucinations. Further, psychologists R Lange and J Huron tested this idea by taking two groups around an old house, one being told to look out for paranormal activity, the other not. It was perhaps not surprising that the group with the expectation of the paranormal had the greater number of unusual experiences.

When a house gets a reputation for possibly being the most haunted house in England – be it Borley Rectory, Chingle Hall or, potentially, The Cage – it's possible that this effect can be exaggerated even more. At Borley Rectory, between May 1937 and 1938, 'official observers' were sent up in ones and twos by ghost hunter Harry Price. They spent the night, often alone, in a huge, semi-desolate, 11-bedroom building without proper modern lighting. Such an exercise could well have enhanced this psychological effect, known as confirmation bias, (i.e. the tendency to search for, interpret, or recall information in a way that confirms one's initial beliefs).

I have seen it happen myself, for instance at a Ghost Club investigation at a derelict underground prison called the Clerkenwell House of Detention. Here, an unusually large number of subjective experiences were reported by both the 'sensitives' and some of the 'totally non-sensitives' in the group. The point was that this was by far the most conventionally 'scary' place (in appearance, history and reputation) recently investigated by the club, and I suspect the same impressions might not have been picked up by a visit to, say, a reputedly haunted supermarket.

With reference to The Cage, while such a theory might explain some phenomena, far too many of them appeared to be of an objective nature – from Coke cans moving by themselves, doors swinging open for no reason, objects being thrown around the living room, growling noises and the occasional psychic investigator being thrown – thankfully unharmed – down the stairs. [5] Whatever the ultimate explanation, these sorts of phenomena go beyond the "I saw something out of the corner of my eye, but might have imagined it" type of experience. It's also worth adding that one of the team used by Mitchell to organise the visiting groups was an experienced magician who took an interest in ensuring that no phenomena could be faked or fabricated.

MOVING ON

Mitchell says that she now has a love-hate relationship with the house, loving the sense of history in the building itself but hating the fact that she owns a property she feels she can never live in again. After almost 10 years, she felt it was time to give the estate agents the go-ahead to advertise it for sale. But where does this leave the search to find out what is actually causing the phenomena?

I believe there are still two ways in which progress can be made.

Firstly, an attempt should be made to collate the records of all the groups who visited, to try to find any correlations between their different experiences there. Bearing in mind that many such groups will read *Fortean Times*, I would be happy to accept any reports of experiences via the email address at the end of this article.

Secondly, we have a house steeped in history and apparent paranormal activity for sale, and I for one very much hope that it is sold to someone with an interest in the field. Vanessa Mitchell was told by a medium that she had somehow been 'chosen' by the house to be its owner. Making the leap of faith that such concepts have any validity, I wonder whether the new owner has already been 'chosen'; possibly, he or she is reading this article today. FT

For more on The Cage, see Alan Murdie's Ghostwatch entry "Neighbourhood Witch" in **FT293:19**.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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ROGUE OSCILLATORS

DANIEL WILSON dusts off his wireless set and tunes in to one of the weirdest controversies in early broadcasting history – a strange story of hellish howlers, ghost cars and witch-hunts.

Imagine tuning in to your favourite radio programme only to hear it drowned by a cacophony of weird noises – a veritable "insurrection in hell", [1] "a howling inferno". [2]

This was the state of wireless in certain areas of the UK from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s. Where other countries were quick to impose regulations on valve radio manufacture, the UK's laws were laxer, leading to the spread of unevolved sets liable to transmit as well as receive. In impish or unskilled hands, early valve radios could fall into states of feedback if volumes were pushed too high, and these feedback tones would infect other radios for miles around. It was termed 'oscillation' or 'howling' – early electronic sound in its untamed 'natural' state, an archetypal 'spooky' whistling sound later popularised by the hands-free electronic instrument, the Theremin.

IN IMPISH OR UNSKILLED HANDS, EARLY VALVE RADIOS COULD FALL INTO STATES OF FEEDBACK

Most listeners oscillated accidentally, but newspaper reports indicate that some people oscillated deliberately and gratuitously over radio programmes they didn't enjoy, or simply for the fun of making an anomalous electronic noise. A crude, disruptive form of Morse communication was also possible by oscillating whilst tapping the aerial.

BOTTOM LEFT: GPO engineers test Marconi experimental wireless apparatus in 1897. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Magician Nevil Maskelyne: the world's first 'hacker'?

The airwaves were haunted by rogue oscillations, and likewise, the streets were stalked by the spectre of the mysterious anti-oscillation vans (a precursor to the TV Detector Vans) instated by the Post Office to detect and punish oscillators.

OSCILLATION'S EMERGENCE

From the very dawn of radio, interference was a serious problem. In the summer of 1903, a radio telegraphic experiment conducted by electrical engineer John Ambrose Fleming at London's Royal Institution suffered malicious interference from the magician Nevil Maskelyne. Fleming was demonstrating Marconi's Morse system, and Maskelyne planned to expose its flaws. Maskelyne had the courtesy to wait until the demonstration neared its end before transmitting his own Morse messages into the apparatus. With the help of an accomplice, Maskelyne sent the word "rats" repeatedly, before sending provocative Shakespeare quotations. Initially, the perpetrator of the messages was unknown, but days later Maskelyne confessed his actions, which Fleming damned as "scientific hooliganism". [3]

Marconi's system – employing a broad swathe of the radio frequency spectrum – was substantially different from later sound broadcasting stations. Nevertheless, the problem of interference remained an issue, especially so since most modern radio sets were potential oscillating transmitters too.

FOX PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

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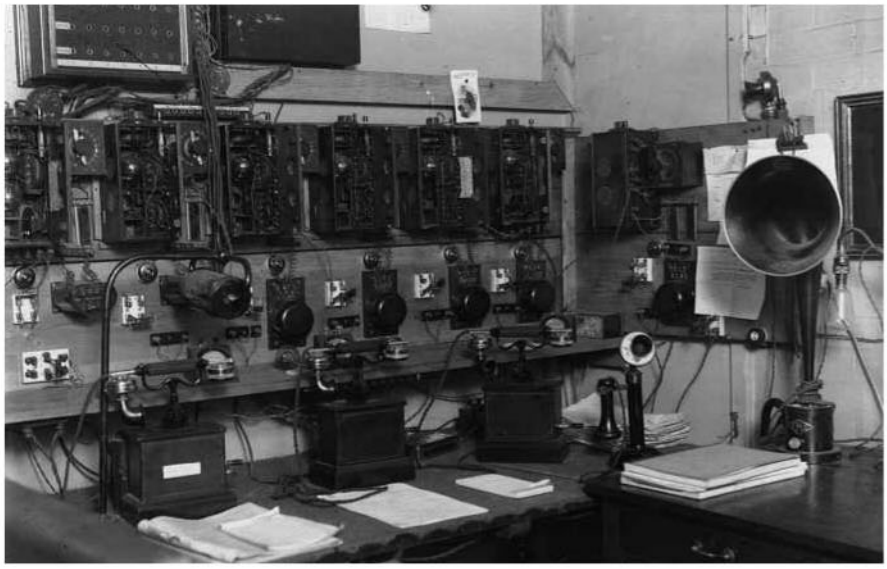
The BBC began broadcasting in 1922, and its weak transmissions were easily affected by atmospherics, electrical interference and nearby oscillating radios. As radio grew increasingly popular, oscillation worsened, and intensified further in the mid-Twenties with the advent of loudspeakers that compelled listeners to push for higher amplification levels.

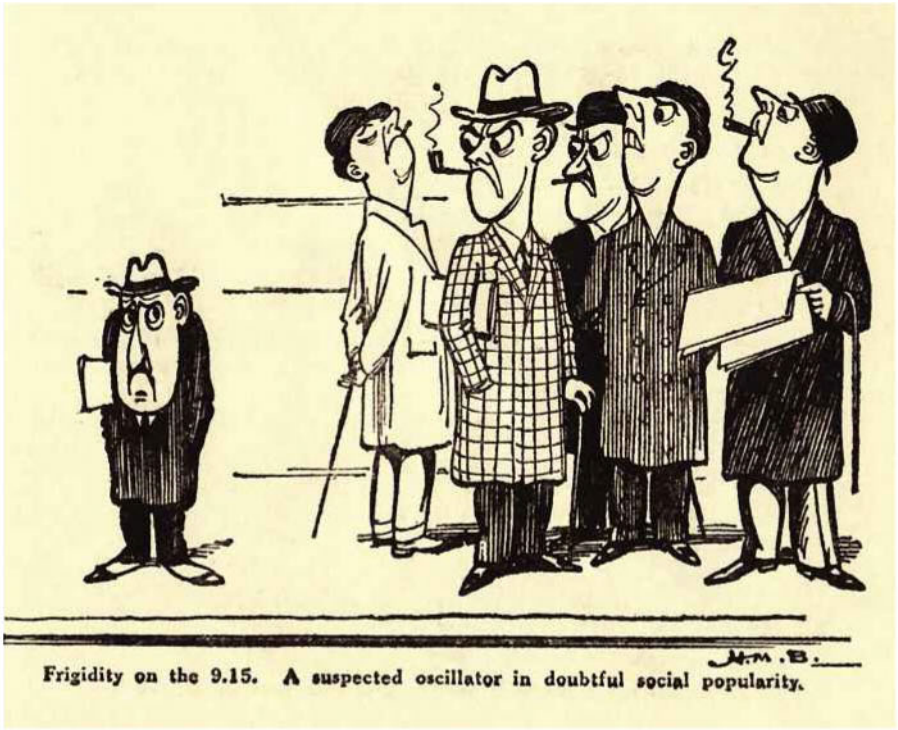
Oscillation occurred whenever listeners over-strained their radios to increase volume. There was no 'volume' dial per se, rather there was a 'reaction' dial controlling the relationship between two coil components that interacted electromagnetically. Volume and tuning sensitivity were tied together. Through the use of the reaction dial, an output coil inside the radio fed back its energy into an input coil. In this way, the valve's input could 'hear' some of its output, augmenting both the signal volume and the inaudible radio tuning frequency. Beyond a certain threshold, radio feedback tones were produced, energising the aerial and transmitting a radio frequency back from the set.

HETERODYNING

Technical literature and hobbyist magazines at the time made concerted efforts to educate amateurs about the dangers of oscillation, but the information was not easily simplified, and there remained much misunderstanding. Oscillation could only occur around a radio station's wavelength. For a radio set to audibly oscillate, two source radio frequencies were needed. This process of creating sounding tones from two inaudible high frequencies is called *heterodyning*. The first source was the home radio's valve, pushed to the point of feedback, oscillating relative to the radio frequency the tuning dial was tuned to. The second source was the radio station itself, broadcasting on its carrier wave. To illustrate: when the two-minute silence for the Armistice Day Remembrance Service was broadcast in 1924, BBC engineers switched off the actual radio transmitters to ensure absolutely no oscillation could occur against that wavelength. [4] On other occasions, the silent parts between programmes often featured the sound of a ticking clock to reassure listeners the station was still tuned, thereby discouraging any fiddling with the reaction dial.



CENTRAL PRESS / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: An early BBC broadcasting station at Savoy Hill, London, in 1924. **LEFT:** The BBC's Chief Engineer and anti-oscillation campaigner Captain Peter Eckersley. **BOTTOM:** The BBC's "Don't Oscillate" campaign saw the distribution of pamphlets whose cartoon illustrations by HM Bateman were meant to offset the dictatorial tone.

One quick but irresponsible way to locate a radio station was to raise the reaction dial to produce oscillation that would remain inaudible *until* the radio station was approached on the tuning dial. In this manner, the tuning dial could be swept back and forth until an oscillation tone was heard. As a radio station's wavelength drew closer, the heterodyned oscillation frequency audibly crept in: a high mellow note that lowered its pitch as one got nearer. Reaching the lowest pitch – the 'silent point' in the middle – meant that the wavelength had been reached. Here, the reaction dial would be ducked down below feedback, then readjusted into a sweet spot to hear the broadcast at optimum volume. However, when reception was poor, listeners tended to oscillate in their attempts to increase volume. The BBC had difficulty broadcasting to certain parts of the UK where terrain hindered reception, [5] creating oscillation hotspots.

These oscillation frequencies would all radiate through the aerial. Thousands of people operating radios like this meant that: "the sum total is many wild and eerie noises". [6] Oscillation was against the terms of a radio licence, but it was difficult to detect offenders and enforce punishment. Instead, the BBC framed oscillation as a moral failing, overseeing anti-oscillation propaganda that led to witch-hunts and confusion.

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CAPTAIN 'DON'T DO IT' ECKERSLEY

A notable early broadcast ruined by oscillation was the BBC's on-air attempt to communicate with America on the morning of Sunday 2 December 1923. The announcer called out: "Hello America! British Isles calling!" This was followed by a hopeful pause, marred by oscillation affecting the BBC relays. Listeners collectively strained the ears of their radios to hear any American reply. The announcer appealed to the local audience: "Listeners, for heaven's sake, give us a chance. Stop oscillating… We want to hear America." The BBC's chief engineer Captain Peter Eckersley then took over the microphone, pleading: "I want to appeal to you to stop oscillating. From the bottom of my heart I implore you to give us a chance. Seriously, it's perfectly rotten of you." [7]

Eckersley went on to become instigator of the "Don't Oscillate" campaign by the BBC and the GPO (The General Post Office, which controlled all broadcasting in the UK at the time). Eckersley produced millions of free pamphlets on oscillation [8]. Editions of the Oscillation pamphlet after 1927 bore cartoon illustrations to offset the dictatorial tone.

The distribution of Oscillation pamphlets heralded the start of a 'wireless paranoia' as the BBC encouraged correspondents to anonymously identify suspected oscillators in their neighbourhoods, who would then receive a pamphlet. Receipt of an oscillation pamphlet would indicate to a householder that a busybody informant had accused them of oscillating. There was also a custom of visiting a suspected oscillator and "stuffing into his letter box an anti-oscillation pamphlet", [9] or an accusatory anonymous letter. [10] Oscillation caused neighbours to become suspicious of each other, and as one newspaper put it, the "furtive detective work that follows is not calculated to maintain the hitherto harmonious relationships of the area." [11].

KIRBY / TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES

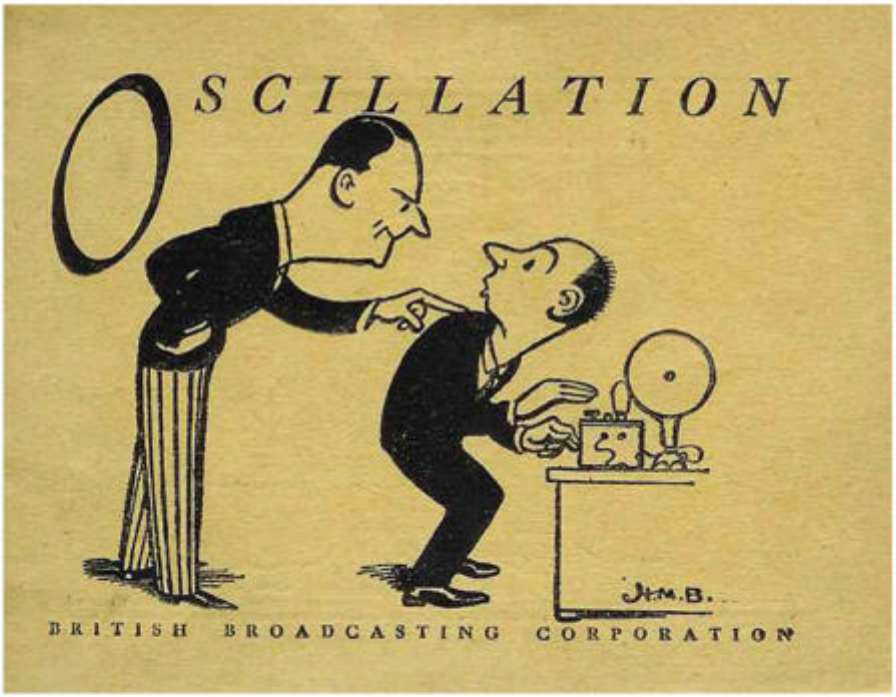
ABOVE: Volunteers dragging the damaged R33 airship back to Pulham, Norfolk, on 17 April 1925.

> "I WANT TO APPEAL TO YOU TO STOP OSCILLATING. FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART I IMPLORE YOU"

The pamphlets explained that if an oscillation tone was heard, and its pitch could be altered by the *tuning dial*, then the reader was oscillating. "Don't do it" was the mantra. If only the volume changed, it was somebody else oscillating, and the question was: who? Reasons for oscillation varied: ignorance, selfish tuning technique or pure devilment.

The absurd aspect of oscillation lent itself to parody in radio plays. One early example is notable for its use of radiophonic electronic sound: the Birmingham BBC station, inspired by the American communication tests, produced a prank in 1924 in which a pantomime was seemingly interrupted by an American station coming through. It was a spoof; poor reception was acoustically simulated by the sound of lead shot in a kettledrum, rustling paper, breaking wood, and the sound of a valve oscillating [12].

Another noteworthy radio drama was a 1927 mock trial of an oscillator – named "Mr Oscillator, aka Mr Knob Twiddler" – who had been caught oscillating red-handed and held in police custody. [13] This was the punishment many wished would befall those who radiated the "discordant howls as those of souls in torment". [14]



ABOVE: The cover of the BBC's 'Oscillation' pamphlet, featuring a cartoon by HM Bateman.

THE R33 INCIDENT

An accident in 1925 involving an airship caused oscillation to be taken more seriously. During the stormy night of 16 April 1925, a gust of wind broke the R33 airship free from its mooring at Pulham, Norfolk, damaging its nose. A small crew happened to be on board, thankfully with a transmitter operated by Spencer Thomas Keeley [15] who kept up communication with ground stations that helped guide the airship. After 30 hours adrift over the North Sea, the R33 managed to land again safely. According to a Post Office announcement, the airship's wavelength was interfered with by people oscillating, and this could have jeopardised communications [16].

It is not known whether the Post Office exploited the R33 incident to highlight the issue of oscillation, but it resonated with one correspondent who wrote to the *Yorkshire Post* stressing that if the R33 had been lost, and the "oscillator or oscillators were discovered," they should have been tried for manslaughter. [17]

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THE "HOWL FOR A SQUEAK" TERROR

Local newspapers regularly featured letters from angry listeners complaining of oscillation, variously signing themselves off as "anti-oscillator", "annoyed", "fed up", "disgusted", and in one case "bloodthirsty". It was said that "offenders attempt to justify themselves by proclaiming their right to 'hoot' a bad show at a theatre," [18] yet oscillation could be heard by many thousands of listeners. Captain Eckersley pleaded: "Cannot we have æther manners as well as ordinary manners?" [19]

When one person oscillated, there was often revenge oscillation in return. The *Nottingham Evening Post* stated: "This 'howl for a squeak' terror is scandalous, and is something the authorities must really put their foot down upon without delay." [20]

Referring to oscillating "pests", one correspondent argued that: "Most of these delinquents gloat over the fact that they have built their own set, which I term 'sets of torture' for themselves and others." [21] The proliferation of "freak circuits" in wireless magazines attracted some blame, [22] and oscillation was often linked with radio licence fee evasion, as evaders were "not under the threat of having their licences cancelled if found out." [23]

We tend to view 'trolling' (as popularised by the Internet) as a modern phenomenon, but the imp of the perverse was alive and well in the ether of the 1920s and 1930s. Oscillating ghouls aroused genuine vitriol, with one reporter fuming that "on Saturday night at Withernsea, there was a person oscillating with so little regard to decency as to constitute an outrage." [24] Sunday sermons provided sport for oscillators: one angry listener described a sacred service where the "air was full of oscillators" who created a "feud" during the whole broadcast, seemingly seeking to "chase one another off the ether." [25] Another correspondent related an extraordinary case of a vaudeville programme where three or four "fanatics" oscillated together: "There is no doubt these pests had an arranged plan." [26]

The reaction dial was too coarse to produce melodic interventions, but reports indicate instances of beating in time with music, [27] and rhythmic oscillation over concerts. [28] Oscillation "with malice" over the National Anthem led one Nottingham listener to believe there was a "'Bolshy' in our midst". [29] An alarmist reporter attracted some ridicule by questioning whether mass oscillation was a rehearsal by Communist agitators testing whether the BBC could be blocked out. [30]

Political speeches were sometimes oscillated upon by opponents, but not as often as one might have expected. (In Germany, incidentally, this became an imprisonable offence.) During the General Strike of May 1926, the government feared that channels of official communication might be disrupted. A headline in the socialist *Daily Herald* ran, "Beware of Wireless! The Government Controls It" and explained how oscillation on a large scale could disrupt broadcasting. This prompted a police raid on the premises where the newspaper was printed, followed by an impassioned debate in the House of Commons on the freedoms of the press. [31] The oscillation fears were unfounded: the newspaper was not printing seditious material, and the strike played out with very little wireless oscillation. Radio broadcasts were an important source of news for strikers and non-strikers alike.

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ABOVE: Tuning in – the inside of one of the GPO's wireless detecting vans in the early 1930s.

IN 1931, THERE WAS ALSO RUMOURED TO BE A GHOST CAR, BUT ITS EXISTENCE IS UNCERTAIN

THE WAR AGAINST THE OSCILLATORS

Oscillating chaos on the airwaves precipitated witch-hunts against oscillators. Oscillator-awareness was kick-started in April 1926 when the BBC began naming-and-shaming districts harbouring oscillators. One newspaper proposed that: "the next step, of course, is to give the numbers of the various houses". [32] Naming a location on air required a complaint signed by six people.

In January 1927, the GPO launched its detector van to track down persistent oscillators, and a second van was unveiled some months later. One van was based in London, and another in Manchester. In 1931, there was also rumoured to be a 'Ghost Car' – a detector disguised as a normal car – but its existence is uncertain. The detection vans carried direction-finding frame aerials on their roofs, rotatable from the inside, within which were customarily two operators and a driver. Sometimes a van would park in a public square on market day, or outside a train station in the evening – a conspicuous sight for workers returning home – [33] to create a moral effect among oscillators as well as unlicensed listeners.

Oscillation angst led to outbreaks of irrationality. Regional BBC station director JCS Macgregor described a letter sent to the BBC by a man giving the address of a suspected oscillator who he believed had a "personal grudge against him" and was somehow "throwing darts into his head" by oscillation to drive him mad. Macgregor joked that many victims of oscillation would "sympathise with the poor victim whose head was splitting under the rain of ethereal darts." A sense of malign intrusion characterises schizophrenia, which, in this case, oscillation seems to have played into.

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OSCILLATION'S AFTERLIFE

When Léon Theremin demonstrated his early electronic instrument in 1927, oscillation found a new use: its notorious howls and squeaks could now be tamed and used to create a new kind of music.

The principle behind oscillation found use in early electronic musical instruments (Jörg Mager's Electrophon was one of the earliest [1]), but it was Russian inventor Léon Theremin whose hands-free instrument gained wider interest. Headlines referring to it cheered, "Oscillation Fiend 'Harnessed' – Instrument that turns screech into music," [2] while some others questioned: "New Jazz Horror?" [3]

Professor AM Low described Professor Theremin as the young Russian who "makes a wireless set oscillate" [4] Oliver Lodge, who had himself sought to produce non-oscillating radios, saw Theremin perform at a Savoy Hotel private show in 1927, and remarked that "all of us have been impressed with the extraordinary skill with which the 'howls' which all wireless experimenters are familiar with have been utilised, controlled, and made musical." [5]

The Theremin did not interfere with radios, as it didn't require a radio station to oscillate against: both its heterodyne frequency sources were self-contained.

In 1932, some newspapers published instructions on how to play "whistling tunes" (à la Theremin) on radios as a Christmas wireless trick, with the proviso that the aerial be disconnected and replaced with a shorter insulated wire to minimise interference and the radio kept tuned to a foreign station rather than the BBC. [6]

The Theremin sound became inextricably tied to the strange and otherworldly after its use in mystery and science fiction films in the 1940s and 1950s. Long before this, however, a prescient correspondent in 1928 highlighted how the oscillation sound savoured of interplanetary communication. Oscillation was, after all, the result of over-reaching for sound on a broadcast wavelength. The tongue-in-cheek letter writer riffed on the bizarre experiments of Essex eccentric Dr Hugh Mansfield Robinson, who had acquired celebrity in the 1920s with his attempts to communicate to a Martian lady named Oomaruru, known to him by telepathy.[7] (In a nutshell, Mansfield engaged Post Office telegraphists to relay messages to Mars on his behalf.) The letter writer wrote: "Will you please publish this to inform the two Mars wireless enthusiasts that Dr Mansfield Robinson's Oomarwin [sic] (the loved one) does NOT, and never did to my knowledge, live in the neighbourhood of Pendrill Street, Beverley Road, so why insist with the oscillations? Mars is quite a long way off." [8]

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Mars Refuses to Answer Radio Messages

DESPITE numerous efforts to communicate with them, the inhabitants of the planet Mars have thus far been consistent in their refusal to have anything to do with the earth-folks at the other end of the telephone line. The latest evidence of the unsocial nature of the Martians came recently when Dr. H. Mansfield Robinson, shown in the picture at the left, attempted to send a message to a woman on Mars who, he expected, had been in communication with him. Although listeners all over the world were on the alert for her response, it failed to come through.

The instruments employed by Dr. Robinson were an ordinary wireless set and a device which he calls a psycho-telepathic mater-meter. Apparently the science of interplanetary communication is as yet a great deal short of perfection.

Dr. H. Mansfield Robinson is shown above with the wireless set with which he attempted to talk with a woman from the planet Mars.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Léon Theremin demonstrates his musical oscillations; Dr Hugh Mansfield uses his wireless to communicate with Mars; Clara Rockmore becomes one of the theremin's first virtuosos.

When Theremin demonstrated his instrument at the Royal Albert Hall on 12 December 1927, it was styled to showcase its possibilities as a modern but down-to-earth orchestral complement; the performance included pieces by Schubert, Offenbach, Camille Saint-Saëns, as well as Scriabin. An adapted Theremin was toured around the UK in the 1930s by 'Musaire' (aka J Forrest Whiteley) with a more vaudeville æsthetic. Meanwhile, in France, a cruciform Theremin was adopted by mystic avant-garde composer Nikolai Obukhov (rechristened as the Croix Sonore), where its otherworldly, transcendental qualities were accentuated to approach the sublime. In the USA, Clara Rockmore popularised the instrument with her virtuoso performances.

Electronic sound did not find much purchase in the comparatively conservative artistic climate of the UK at the time. [9] *Wireless World* wag 'Cathode Ray' wrote disparagingly of the Theremin in 1937, likening it to yesterday's oscillations, writing: "Did you ever have the misfortune to hear certain depressing moans issuing from a loudspeaker and controlled by a man jerking his hand to and from a stick, like a timid snake charmer?"[10] The writer found more potential in the body-proximity capacitive effect for use in burglar alarms and electronic advertisement signs.

Taking into account the eventual musical applications of oscillation, those anarchic early radio oscillations should perhaps be reappraised (posthumously pardoned?) as primordial electronic soundmaking interventions: fledgling electronic tonestuff trespassing upon a culture not yet ready for its introduction.

NOTES

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The GPO detector vans (aka Radio Investigation Vans) were later said to be capable of detecting licence evaders. This was an unusual development, as it implied the vans could detect non-oscillating radios, casting some doubt on the technology being used. Indeed, an exposé soon followed revealing that the vans were just a psychological deterrent, ineffective at pinpointing oscillation and certainly incapable of detecting unlicensed radios. [34] Captain Eckersley admitted as much in his 1941 memoirs. [35]

Curiously, the notion that non-radiating radios could be detected by subtler oscillations formed the basis of the TV Detector Vans unveiled in 1952 solely to locate unlicensed televisions. The TV Detector Vans were said to detect the oscillations derived from the line-scanning coils inside televisions. [36] Like the earlier radio vans, the technique was practically useless for locating equipment with any certainty.

Nevertheless, the first GPO detector vans had a profound effect. Whenever a detector van visited an area, there was always a drop in oscillation, and an increase in radio licence applications.

TAKE WARNING!!
HERE LIES A CHAP WHO MET HIS FATE BECAUSE THE ASS WOULD OSCILLATE. HE GOT IT IN THE NECK AS HE WAS CAUGHT BY CAPT ECKERSLEY
THE FATE OF THE ASS-CILLATOR !!!

TOPICAL PRESS AGENCY / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: A warning to oscillators as depicted in a topical cartoon from a 1920s wireless magazine.

PUTTING THE IRE INTO WIRELESS

The GPO/BBC's war against oscillation attracted some criticism for its heavy-handedness, but most listeners hailed the campaign as the best way to root out oscillators. The actual penalties were rather vague, ranging from fines to confiscation of equipment. The first person publicised as being punished for oscillation (in October 1929) was made a scapegoat: a Mr A Britton of Overndale Road, Fishponds, Bristol, simply had his licence cancelled, [37] but this news instilled wider fear into oscillation-inclined listeners.

The 1929 BBC handbook reported that it received 15,000 complaints about oscillation that year. Radio broadcasting was popularised in peacetime as a way of bringing people together, but ironically the oscillation problem incited many violent disputes between neighbours. Eyes were blacked over garden fences, aerials were chopped down, taunts were shouted, hair was pulled and faces clawed and threats of murder were barked ("I will ram this knife in your back, you oscillating ****"), [38] among many other varieties of oscillation-related altercations.

Over the course of the 1930s, higher power radio stations, indoor directional aerials and better circuits and valves consigned oscillation – and the violent disagreements it spawned – to oblivion. It wasn't quite the end of oscillation, however; in the hands of Léon Theremin and others it enjoyed a surprising musical afterlife (see panel, p43). Oscillation also found its way into a wider conflict than any imagined by the GPO of the 1920s: after the outbreak of WWII, whole countries were actively jamming each other's signals, fighting an 'ether war', by heterodyning tones or by overpowering each other's transmitters with other broadcasts. But that's another story... [39] FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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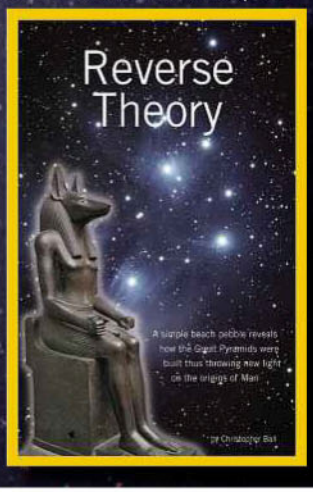
Closer inspection of the humble beach pebble could spell disaster for the theory of evolution.

The one fact that gives geology its timetable is the erosion process 'How long did it take that pebbled beach to look like that sandy beach' From solid rock to boulders, boulders to pebbles and from pebbles to sand. Our great scholars collectively agreed that to form all the sand in the world would take a thousand million years (an aeon) and confirmed "This Planet Must Be Old"

Dictionary – Sand - *Created over the past half billion years.*

From this point onwards everything known to the history of Mankind was constructed. Deeptime was born; sedimentation rates, dinosaurs, KT boundary, fossil record, unconformities, evolution and plate tectonics are all dated from this old planet perspective, and it's these facts that give radioactivity their sub atomic readings.

However' an aeon to form the entire world's sand is totally wrong because beach pebbles are formed by the process of tide-mark, they get bigger not smaller. Every dirty tide leaves a mark, a tidemark, a dirty stain over a previous hardened and scuffed stain. Broken layers clearly seen if one wishes to see them. Dirty layers around the rim, like a washbasin or seabasin, teacup or teaspoon, or grain of sand in an oyster, a pearl, and the process is the same. Consequently our foundation for Deeptime and thus radioactive dating is also wrong.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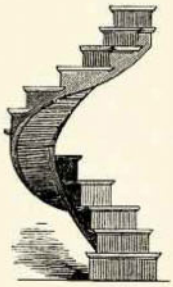

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STRANGE RAIN

Charles Fort collected numerous accounts of peculiar precipitations – falls of frogs and showers of fish, black rains and bloody downpours, ash-filled skies and deadly smogs. In an exclusive extract from her new book *Rain: A Natural and Cultural History*, environmental journalist **CYNTHIA BARNETT** reminds us that such weird weather events continue today, and that humankind plays a considerable role in creating them...

On a June day in 1954, Sylvia Mowday had taken her children to a park in Sutton Coldfield just north of Birmingham, when the overcast skies darkened and a rainstorm caught them by surprise. Mother, son, and daughter began to run for shelter, but gentle thuds against their umbrellas froze them like statues. Something was falling with the rain. It was too soft for hail, and seemed to be alive. The family soon realized they were in a tempest of tiny frogs. Looking to the sky, they watched wee frog bodies fall with the individual symmetry of snowflakes. Mrs Mowday estimated that thousands of frogs fell over several minutes. Afterward, they "were afraid to move in case we trod on them."

FROGS FROM THE SKY

Throughout history, bewildered observers have sworn to similar episodes of frogs falling with rain. They show up in Greek literature, in the work of chroniclers from the Middle Ages, in accounts from French soldiers fighting the Austrians at Lalain in 1794: A hot afternoon was broken by such heavy showers that 150 soldiers had to abandon their trench as it filled with rainwater. In the middle of the storm, tiny toads began to pelt down and jump about in all directions. When the rain let up, the solders discovered more toads in the folds of their three-cornered hats.

Frog and toad rains, fish rains, and coloured rains – most often, red, yellow, or black – are among the most common accounts of strange rain, reported since ancient times. "It has very often rained fishes," wrote the Greek historian Athenæus in AD 200, in his *Deipnosophistæ,* or the Banquet of the Sophists. He went on to recount tales of fish rain – including one scaly downpour that went on for three days – and falling frogs. He recites the oldest account of frog rain from a book of history (now lost) written in the second century BC by the Greek philosopher Heraclides Lembus. So great was the frog-fall that it poisoned the wells, forcing people to abandon their homes:

> A VILLAGER SAID: "I THOUGHT THAT A PLANE CARRYING A CARGO OF FROGS HAD EXPLODED"

In Pæonia and Dardania, it has, they say, before now rained frogs; and so great has been the number of these frogs that the houses and the roads have been full of them; and at first, for some days, the inhabitants, endeavouring to kill them, and shutting up their houses, endured the pest; but when they did no good, but found that all their vessels were filled with them, and the frogs were found to be boiled up and roasted with everything they ate, and when besides all this, they could not make use of any water, nor put their feet on the ground for the heaps of frogs that were everywhere, and were annoyed also by the smell of those that died, they fled the country.

The account calls Exodus to mind; frogs are one of the 10 plagues God sends down to Egypt, where they swarm the houses, bedchambers, beds, people, ovens, and kneading-troughs. In 1946, the professional sceptic Bergen Evans – later arbiter for the television series *The $64,000 Question* – proposed that stories of falling frogs and fish "are a sort of detritus of the old belief in spontaneous generation," with roots in ancient myths and biblical references to aerial waters "above the firmament." But frog and fish rains show up far too often to be rejected as what Evans called meteorological myth.

In 1873, *Scientific American* ran eyewitness accounts of a storm that rained frogs on Kansas City, Missouri. In 1901, witnesses in Minneapolis swore to a similar slimy deluge. Reports of frog rain continue in modern times, although less frequently than in the past. Residents of Naphlion in southern Greece were surprised by a rain of small green frogs in May 1981. A Belgrade newspaper reported a thick rain of frogs in the Serbian village of Odzaci in 2005. A villager, Caja Jovanovic, said he was watching a strange-shaped cloud when "frogs started to fall. I thought that a plane carrying a cargo of frogs had exploded." In 2010, hapless frogs fell upon shoppers in Rákóczifalva, Hungary, during a thunderstorm. The same year, frogs and fish rained from a cloud during a downpour in Nakuru, in Kenya's Rift Valley.

RAINS OF FISHES

In the early 20th century, Eugene Willis Gudger, an ichthyologist with the American Museum of Natural History and editor of the museum's *Bibliography of Fishes,* reported that he had authenticated 71 accounts of fish rain, spanning AD 300 through the 1920s. "I have personally never been so fortunate as to experience or even witness such a rain," he wrote, "but I cannot disregard the evidence recorded by scientific men." In one of his eyewitness accounts, from May 1900, family members in Providence, Rhode Island, were pelted with "squirming perch and bull-pouts, from two to four and a half inches long, which fell on yards and streets – covering about a quarter of an acre." A reporter from the *Providence Journal* gathered a bucketful.

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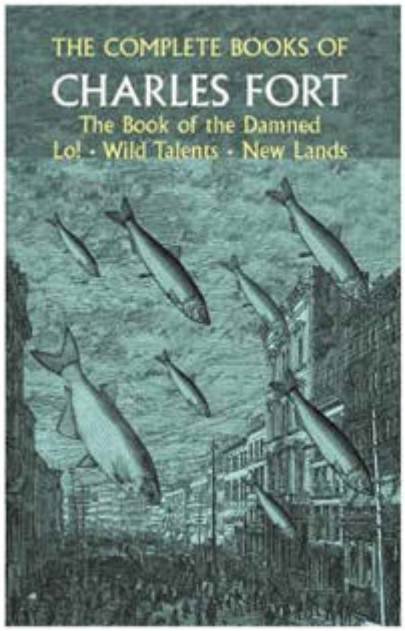
ABOVE: A fish fall in East Ham, London, in May 1984 photographed by FT founder Bob Rickard. **BELOW:** Numerous accounts of fish falls appear in Fort's books.

Gudger believed there could be but one explanation: "High winds, particularly whirlwinds, pick up water, fishes and all, and carry them inland where, when the velocity of air and clouds becomes relatively lowered, the fishes fall to earth." He wrote that no one who had "experienced or even seen the prodigious effects and carrying power of a land tornado can have any doubt of the ability of a waterspout, a water tornado, to bring about a 'Rain of Fishes.'"

Still more peculiar rains reported over history have included hay, snakes, maggots, seeds, nuts, stones, and shredded meat (that last one is suspected to have dropped from a boisterous flock of feeding vultures). Dirt-toting rains are more common. In 1902, a massive dust storm kicked up in Illinois blew to the Eastern Seaboard, where it met up with thick rain clouds over New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. The resulting strange rain was short but shocking for those caught in it: the sky rained mud. "People who were on the street were covered with mud spots," wrote a *New York Times* correspondent from the Finger Lakes region of New York. "Clothes hanging on the line were smeared." In Aurora, New York, the Reverend George P Sewell wrote that the storm front was 40 miles (64km) across and "discoloured or soiled everything exposed to it."

In recent years, in certain parts of the world including Australia's Lajamanu in the Northern Territory and the village of Yoro in Honduras, people who remember fish rains from childhood have experienced them again as adults, grabbing buckets to collect dinner from heaven. Yoro has begun an annual carnival, *Festival de la Lluvia de Peces*, to celebrate the phenomenon. Australian scientists have some of the best long-term data on fish falls, beginning in the 1920s, but not enough to explain them definitively. Modern meteorologists agree with Dr Gudger's theory that tornadoes and waterspouts are the most likely culprits. In one of the few reports of multiple species falling from the sky, in June 1957, thousands

PECULIAR RAINS HAVE INCLUDED HAY, SNAKES, MAGGOTS, SEEDS, NUTS AND SHREDDED MEAT



of small fish, frogs, and crawfish rained down on an Alabama town called Magnolia Terminal. A tornado reported around 15 miles to the south was likely responsible, speculates the severe-weather guru Dr Greg Forbes. But he and other scientists acknowledge it doesn't explain why an air current would pick up only small frogs or fish and not every other algæ and creature from the same pond.

The strange rain of Labor Day 1969 in Punta Gorda, Florida, especially begs the question. During an otherwise normal rainstorm, golf balls seemed to hail onto the rooftops and roads; at least that's what local police Lieutenant Clarence Walter claimed to the *St Petersburg Times,* which ran the story under the header "Streets, Gutters a Duffer's Dream." The newspaper reported that "dozens and dozens and dozens" of golf balls lined the sidewalks, streets, and gutters following the rain, but gave no theories as to why. *Popular Mechanics* magazine speculated that a waterspout could have sipped up a ball-filled pond, then dropped its catch on the town. It seemed like an appropriate strange rain for golf-enthused southwest Florida. Often, the rain that falls upon us is simply returning what we've put into the earth.

COLOURED RAINS

Judging by sheer number of words published on the subject, no one person has given more thought to strange rain than Charles Fort; coloured rains were perhaps his greatest obsession – red rains, yellow rains, "rain so black as to be described as a 'shower of ink.'"

Many of Fort's pet phenomena, including frog and fish falls and coloured rains, have since been accepted by science – if not entirely explained. In 1981, US Secretary of State Alexander Haig cited yellow rain as evidence when he accused the Soviet Union of supplying chemical weapons to Communist Vietnam and Laos to use against the Hmong people, in violation of the Geneva Protocol and 1972 Biological Weapons Convention. The biologist and bee expert Thomas D Seeley, now at Cornell, thought the description sounded like the massive "defecation flights" of honeybees known to send bee poop and pollen in rainlike showers of yellow. He later worked with the Harvard chemical-weapons expert Matthew Meselson to denounce the government's claim and show "physical and biological evidence that yellow rain is the fæces of Southeast Asian honeybees." Refugee workers and Hmong people, who survived horrific experiences regardless of whether chemical attacks

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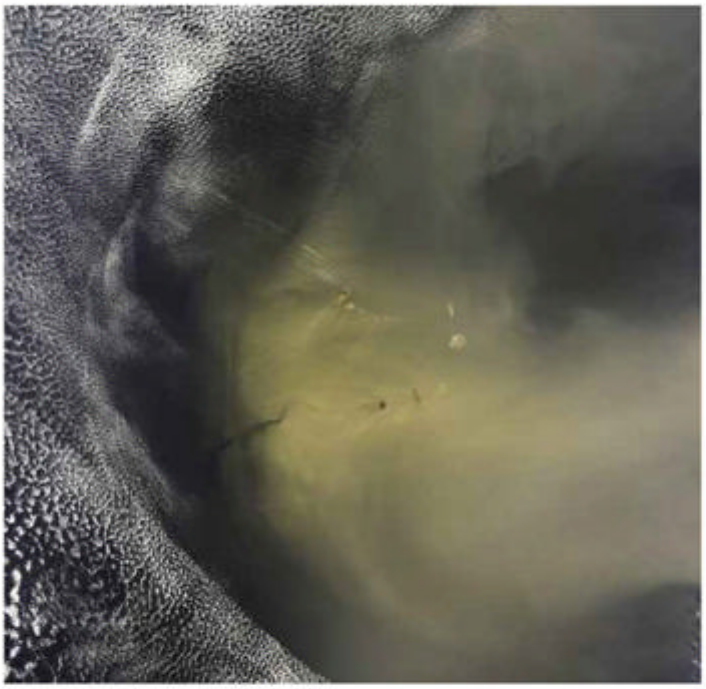

ABOVE: Huge dust clouds swirling across the Atlantic from North Africa to South America are pictured in recent images released by NASA that illustrate how Earth's largest tropical rainforest relies on its biggest desert to flourish. Some 27.7 million tons of Saharan dust reaches the Amazon basin each year, where it fertilises depleted soils. The figure was deduced from analysis of three-dimensional imagery supplied by a NASA satellite of the massive tan brown plumes that can be seen from space. It has also been calculated that about 22,000 tons of phosphorus (a remnant of the Sahara's past as a lake bed) make the journey annually, replacing the same amount washed away in the Amazon by rain and floods. They reckon 182 million tons of dust is normally carried west each year, but much is flushed into the sea by rain. **BELOW:** Red rain collecting in a coconut shell in Kerala.

occurred, believe they did occur. Other scientists and former CIA agents remain divided or uncertain. Fort could have told them he knew of reports of yellow rain in history stretching back to 1695 in Ireland.

Fort likewise collected many reports of red rain. He was incensed by the scientific explanations that they must be associated with Saharan sandstorms. "My own impositivist acceptances are: That some red rains are coloured by sands from the Sahara desert; Some by sands from other terrestrial sources; Some by sands from other worlds, or from their deserts – also from aerial regions too indefinite or amorphous to be thought of as 'worlds' or planets."

Falls of red rain and red dust are well documented today. Meteorologists do link most of them to the great Sahara. Weather satellites show the dust sweeping for thousands of miles into the Atlantic Ocean, gusting north to call children to write "Wash Me" on the cars of Wales, or blowing south, where it can weaken formation of hurricanes that otherwise might wallop the eastern United States.

In at least one intriguing case though, blood-red rains have been coloured by something more mysterious. For more than a century along the southwest coast of India in the state of Kerala, people have observed red rains so rich they can stain white clothes pink. Conventional wisdom had it that Kerala's red rains were caused by dust from a distant desert. But after a red rain in the summer of 2001, when researchers analysed scarlet rainwater collected around Kerala, they found it contained no dust. It was full of microscopic red particles that looked like biological cells. Other scientists suspected they were spores from abundant algæ that cover trees in the region. But physicists Godrey Louis and Santhosh Kumar found that the pigmented particles (stored in laboratories, they maintain their deep red colour all these years later) did not contain the flagellæ usually found in algæ cells; other scientists have also disproved the algal-bloom theory.

Louis and Kumar hypothesised that the 2001 rain was linked to a meteor airburst that occurred over Kottoyam the day the red drops began to fall. The scientists caused a stir when they wondered if the red particles could be extraterrestrial in origin. Their latest study has been published with a team of astrobiologists and molecular biologists in the UK who were initially sceptical of the claims. The team found that the red rain cells survive and grow after incubating for two hours at 121 ˚C (250 ˚F); most forms of life on Earth grow in a temperature range between 10 and 45 ˚C. When exposed to the extreme heat, the red cells began to produce daughter cells. Additionally, the team reported that the fluorescent luminosity of the red cells bears "remarkable correspondence with the extended red emission observed in the Red Rectangle planetary nebula and other galactic and extragalactic dust clouds."

The scientists suggested an extraterrestrial origin. Others remain sceptical, but this much is certain: Charles Fort at last would have had a scientific theory he could buy into.

BLACK RAIN AND KILLER SMOG

Just as rain can reflect the joy or melancholy of the person caught in the downpour, rain's quality or cleanliness reflects the air and oceans it travels through. While many of us revel in the scent of rain from childhood, rain can also take on the sickening tastes and odours of pollution – or death. Survivors of the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 reported black rains that poured for up to seven hours after the bombings. Some children wandering in the hellish aftermath were so thirsty they collected the inky rain and drank it, succumbing quickly to death.

Surviving prisoners of Auschwitz describe rains of unimaginable misery, stinking of diarrhoea. It would take survivors years to remember rain's pleasantness, in the same way they had to relearn to use toothbrushes, eating utensils, and toilet paper – in the same way they had to relearn to smile.

Charles Fort was especially interested in black rains, which frequently fell on the British Isles in

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BOTH PHOTOS: CENTRAL PRESS / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Two views of London's Great Fog of 1952. **ABOVE:** A rain of ash resulted when Indonesia's Mount Merapi volcano erupted violently on 30 October 2010.

the 19th century. Shepherds on the upland moors gave the name "moorgrime" to the inky rains and soot that accumulated on the fleeces of their sheep. It was some of the first proof that industrial emissions could be carried for long distances. It was also a reminder that what goes up must come down; sometimes, with the air-scrubbing rain.

Some of the tales of black rains of ash and pulverised pumice that Fort collected from Europe could be attributed to Mount Vesuvius in Italy. The volcano erupted five times in the second half of the 19th century. But chemists linked the greasy rains that could turn a white sheep black to the soot emanating from the manufacturing cities of northern England and central Scotland – then cranking out Mr Macintosh's double textures and other textiles, along with a choking grime that blackened the air in London, Manchester, and beyond. Simply put: the more pollution we pump into the atmosphere, the dirtier the rain.

In 1853, Charles Dickens opened his novel *Bleak House* with a soft black drizzle, "flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes," and "fog everywhere." Fog is essentially an eye-level cloud. If cooling air becomes saturated with water vapour, some of the vapour condenses around microscopic bits, forming droplets, which turn to fog. Given the exact same amount of water vapour, fog over a dirty city will be much thicker than fog over the sea because it gloms on to all those particles of smoke.

By Dickens's time, it was obvious that the atmosphere over industrial cities was no longer entirely natural. In the countryside, he wrote, "fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City… it was rusty-black."

THE ATMOSPHERE OVER BRITAIN'S INDUSTRIAL CITIES WAS NO LONGER ENTIRELY NATURAL

ADEK BERRY / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Londoners called the thick brews of smoke and fog that could alight on the city "pea-soupers" or "London Particulars". When a pea-souper claimed 1,150 lives at the turn of the 20th century, a physician, Harold Des Voeux of the Coal Smoke Abatement Society, dubbed the choking air "smog". The region's coal-fired factory kilns and boilers, along with steam locomotives and ships, fumes from lorries and buses, and the soft coal that burned in the hearth of every home, would culminate famously in London's Great Fog of 1952. The worst pea-souper in London's history, it was bleaker than anything Dickens could have dreamed up.

As the calendar turned to December, a cold, damp fog settled on the city, absorbing all the smoke and soot in the air. Those conditions were not unusual. But on 5 December, the winds stopped blowing. A band of warm, high pressure moved in, which trapped the colder air below and held the toxic smog in place, suffocating the city.

The smog thickened and darkened until visibility was reduced to near zero. Streetlights burned all day. People made facemasks for themselves and their children before venturing outside. Once out, greasy soot rained upon them, and many could not find their way home. They inched along pavements by feeling the walls of buildings. They abandoned their cars. Bus and tram services were halted, Heathrow Airport and the Port of London

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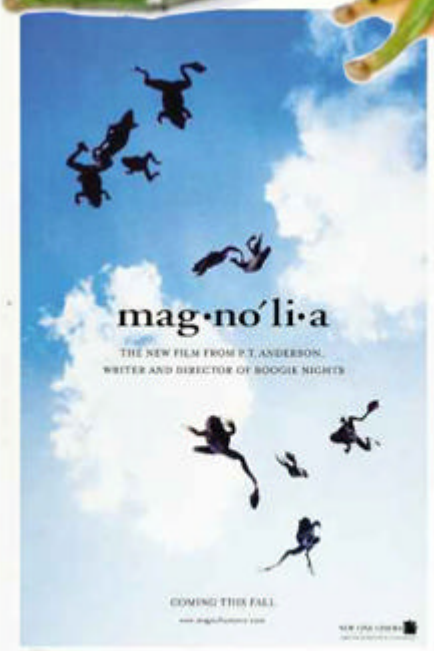

TOP: An American green tree frog.
LEFT: The 1999 film *Magnolia* brought frog falls before a wider audience.

shuttered. People, press, and politicians were so focused on the fog's unusual consequences for daily life – criminals were exploiting it to conceal a rash of "burglaries, attacks, and robberies" and all football games were cancelled, along with *La Traviata* when the murk filled Sadler's Wells Theatre – they were slow to recognise the unfolding human health disaster.

Ultimately, the Great Fog killed 12,000 people – 4,000 over the five days it lingered, and an estimated 8,000 more in the months to follow. For many months afterward, the government tried to minimise the significance and magnitude of the deaths, and to characterise the killer fog as a natural disaster. It would take four years, but Parliament finally passed a Clean Air Act in 1956 that created zones where only smokeless fuels could be burned, and required relocation of power stations away from cities.

Great Britain has never again seen the black rains of its dark industrial history, although in the United States, a memorable black rain fell in South Boston in 1960. Engineers at the Metropolitan Transit Authority power plant combined pulverised coal and oil, creating a disastrous mess of emissions that mixed with the falling rain to produce a "black ink that would not wash off surfaces and foamed when it hit the street." Black rains and black snow also fell in the northern mountain ranges of India's Jammu and Kashmir in the winter of 1991; with no heavy industry in the region, scientists linked them to the burning of oil wells in Kuwait during the Gulf War. In the 21st century, bloggers in China have reported black rains associated with plants burning coal and poor-quality heavy oils on several occasions from Shenzhen, just north of Hong Kong. Residents reported that the rains can carry a pungent odour, cause a burning sensation to skin, corrode car paint, and leave raindrop-sized holes in flower petals.

THE HEALTH OF FROGS

In his 1999 movie *Magnolia,* the American filmmaker Paul Thomas Anderson directed one of the most shocking rains of film history when he sent grotesque frogs, big as four-pound broilers, pounding from the sky in a heavy rainstorm. At first, it looked as if just a few plump frogs were being flung past the windows of characters involved in the nine-way plot. Then, as the camera held a shot of a swimming pool, underwater lights glowing in the night, the staggering scale was revealed. Thousands upon thousands of oversized frogs hurl down with the hammering rain –plopping into the pool, thwacking deck and diving board, crashing into trees, and thudding into the street until it's lumpy with carcasses.

Anderson says *Magnolia*'s amphibian apocalypse was inspired by Fort, whose writing on frogs then sent him to read Exodus. *Magnolia* is full of fortean cameos; the child genius in the film reads *Wild Talents* as he sits in a library cramming to prepare for his appearance on a TV game show. Fort "believed in 'Magonia', a mythical place above the firmament where stuff would go up to and hang out before dropping back down to Earth. *Magnolia* is a little tribute to that," Anderson told *Variety*. "And it sounds funny, but he believed that you can judge a society by the health of its frogs. That doesn't seem too crazy to me."

It doesn't seem too crazy at all. Scientists say frogs are bioindicators; their wellbeing reflects the environment's. Because they require both land and aquatic habitat, and have permeable skin that easily absorbs toxins, they are faithful signals of ecological havoc.

There is no greater rain lover than the frog. This truth is held so deeply in India that, when drought takes hold and people are desperate for rain, they'll search out a pair of frogs and organise a frog marriage, replicating all the customs and rituals of a human wedding with hundreds of guests. After the nuptials, the frogs are set free with a prayer for rain.

Frogs symbolise rain for many Native American tribes. Among the Zuni who live beside the Zuni River in New Mexico, frogs are considered the children of six rain priests – U'wanami – who live in houses made of cumulus clouds. The Hopi fashion musical instruments from gourds, a resonator and rasping stick, that mimic the song of frogs to call home rain.

Frogs do seem to call the rain, or at least predict it. Nineteenth-century science journals describe how Europeans kept tree frogs in tall glass jars as wee weather forecasters. Frogs have a "barometric propensity," wrote one chronicler, crawling up their tiny ladders on sunny days, hunkering down in the water below when a storm approached.

In Louisiana, the Creole people say: *Laplie tombé ouaouaron chanté* – "when the rain is coming, the bullfrogs sing." In my home of Florida, summer storms are preceded by an ecstatic, escalating ensemble. The weatherwise chorus includes the rain call of the squirrel tree frog – a chattering scold that sounds just like its namesake – and that of the green tree frog, whose rain call southerners claim sounds like "fried bacon, fried bacon".

Many people in the South just call any tree frog a rain frog. As soon as the rain arrives, the mass chorus changes on cue, from rain call to mating call. Frogs often wait for a "stump-floating storm" to breed, explained the Florida naturalist Archie Carr. Those that lay their eggs in a new rain pool protect their young from the enemies lurking in established ponds, carnivorous water bugs and beetles.

If Fort is right that society shall be judged by the health of its frogs, we're in for a harsh adjudication. Frogs have survived in more or less their current form for the past 250 million years: they made it through the mega-droughts and the pluvials, the ice ages and the asteroids. Today they are vanishing; perhaps this is why frog rains have become so rare in modern times. Nearly 200 frog species have vanished since 1980 and more than a third of all surviving amphibians are now threatened with extinction, part of a larger catastrophe that scientists call the world's sixth mass extinction.

The rain-loving little bioindicators are definitely trying to tell us something. FT

Extracted from *Rain: A Natural and Cultural History* (where a complete list of sources can be found) © 2015 by Cynthia Barnett. Published by Crown, Penguin Random House LLC.

Cynthia Barnett will be speaking at the Cloud Appreciation Society Conference in London on 26 September 2015.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

CYNTHIA BARNETT is an environmental journalist in the United States who specialises in water. Her books include *Blue Revolution: Unmaking America's Water Crisis* (2011) and *Rain: A Natural and Cultural History* (2015).

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The Adventure of the Sailor in the River

HELEN BARRELL solves an unusual maritime mystery involving a sailor who wasn't quite what he seemed...

HELEN BARRELL is a librarian at the University of Birmingham. She transcribes parish registers for www.FreeREG.org.uk. Her book *Poison Panic: Arsenic Deaths in 1840s Essex* will be out in 2016.

For a place that's often described as a sleepy fishing village, Wivenhoe, on the northeast Essex coast, has had its fair share of excitement, from an earthquake in the 1880s to pitched battles between striking miners and police in the 1980s.

On 16 May 1850, the village was the scene of a tragic accident, when a 16-year-old sailor called George Henry Bills drowned in the River Colne. George was from the busy seafaring town of Harwich, and had gone to sea only the day before aboard a schooner called the *Sovereign*. The inquest was carried out the next day at an inn called the *Ship at Launch* (in those days, inquests were often held in pubs; one wonders if this might have contributed to pub hauntings). George's shipmates, among them the spectacularly named Salvenus Ablett, were questioned and the jury returned a verdict of "Found drowned." [1] (*Essex Standard*, 17+24 May 1850)

This story – an all-too familiar tale at the time – might have remained merely a sad reminder of the dangers of a mariner's life, [2] just a brief report in the local press. But when George's earthly remains were prepared for burial, it was discovered that 'he' was female. George's inquest had only been reported in the local press, but this surprising turn of events was reported the length and breadth of Britain. Newspapers far from Essex – in Manchester, Inverness, Kendal, Exeter, Bristol and Worcester – ran the story, with universal astonishment at the "female sailor… a poor girl who had been engaged in seaman's garb." [2] None of these reports printed George's name, but it's easy to work out: he was the only mariner for whom there was an inquest at Wivenhoe in this timeframe. He was interred in the churchyard on 20 May, and despite the unusual discovery of George's identity, the burial register only records that this was George Henry Bills. Perhaps we can learn something today from this vicar, who registered George under the name he had chosen, rather than the one he was given at birth.

At this distance of time, it's impossible for us to know if George would have identified as being transgender – someone born female but who wished to live as a man – or was just frustrated with the limited options available to women at the time. Either way, the decision to present as a boy and go to sea surely makes him an audacious character who bravely leap-frogged the gender norms of the era. Despite the surprise exhibited by the press, it wasn't unheard of for females to dress as men and take on male roles.

Mrs Christian Davies (1667-1739) passed as a man in the British Army for nearly 10 years, until she was wounded and became the first female Chelsea Pensioner. There are numerous accounts of females disguised as men who fought in the US Civil War in the 1860s, and the folk song "Sweet Polly Oliver", about a woman who disguises herself as a man so that she can follow her sweetheart into battle, dates from 1840 or earlier.

While Wivenhoe's burial register remains silent on the subject of George's gender, there is a note beside a burial entry from 1759 in the register of Kirby-le-Soken – about 15 miles (24km) away from Wivenhoe – which says: "John ye Taylor who upon death was found to be a woman – she had lived in ye parish above 20 years in a man's habit and got her livelihood by the trade of a Taylor." It is remarkable that John had passed for all that time, working closely with men and being accepted as a man by the good people of Kirby.

Although we will probably never know more about John, it's possible, with some genealogical sleuthing, to discover that 'George' was born Emma Bills, on 14 October 1833. Emma's baptism entry includes a date of birth, and when George was "ticketed" (as all merchant seamen were – they would automatically be in the Navy should war break out) at Harwich in May 1850, he gave the same date of birth. Other evidence suggests that by 1850 George was an orphan, and so going to sea perhaps had a financial imperative – George's three siblings at Harwich may even have known about his seafaring plan.

How long George could have passed as a boy aboard the *Sovereign* is debateable, but I think his story is worth the telling. Forteana – unusual data that disturbs the accepted narrative – is sometimes, as in this case, the history of a marginalised group, and one wonders how many other Georges there were – gender adventurers who slipped off the paper record. FT

NOTES

1 *Essex Standard*, 17+24 May 1850.

2 The church of All Saints, at Brightlingsea, just up the river from Wivenhoe, has a frieze of tiles, one for each parishioner who died at sea. They start from 1872, and end in 1988: there are over 200.

3 *Inverness Courier*, 6 June 1850.

For further examples of cross-dressing female sailors, see Paul Chambers, 'The Navy Lark', **FT279:57**.

BELOW: Sailors on Wivenhoe waterfront; the author's great-great-grandfather is on the left.

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Ghosts of the firestorm

Seventy years ago, the German city of Dresden was destroyed in an Allied bombing raid that killed 25,000 of its inhabitants. JENNY RANDLES recalls how a chance encounter revealed the strange story of one woman who survived the horrors of that night but was left with her own personal ghosts.

JENNY RANDLES is a longtime FT contributor and regular columnist. She is the author of some 50 books on UFOs and other fortean phenomena and a former director of investigations for BUFORA.

In February this year, the world commemorated the 70th anniversary of one of the most controversial allied missions of World War II. It was a story of horror for those who were caught in the middle and the source of one of the most remarkable stories I have ever investigated.

Lucia was a spry German lady in her mid-70s when we met by chance a few years ago, sharing a small room in a Cheshire hospital. We had two weeks to get to know one another whilst I recovered from gall bladder surgery and she was undergoing tests. Gradually her story unfolded towards its chilling conclusion; it's one that deserves to be shared with *FT* readers.

Lucia was born in the beautiful city of Dresden. Her family were quite well off, with her father being a jeweller – a fact that helped us bond, since my fiancé was also a jeweller from nearby Chester.

On the evening of 13 February 1945, with the war winding to its conclusion, Dresden's fine buildings and artwork were mostly untouched. However, as the allies headed towards Berlin and Russian troops encircled Dresden from the east, Lucia's father announced to the family: "I am not going on home guard duty tonight."

"But you must," his wife spluttered, aware of the heavy price he might pay with Hitler sending old and young to the front to desperately defend the nation.

Undeterred, he moved their most valuable possessions into the cellar and then ordered his wife and daughter to get ready as they were going to the shelters.

They were aghast at this suggestion. "The British will not bomb us. We are a city of culture," his wife insisted. But he would not be dissuaded.

Soon afterwards over 1,000 bombers – first British, then American – dropped a rain of incendiary bombs that ignited many square miles of the city. Women and children were incinerated where they stood. Human bodies melted, fused to the pavements. Tornadoes of fire swirled at 150mph (240km/h) and sucked children upwards, breaking them into pieces and dropping them miles beyond the city.

Air, too, was removed by these tunnels of flame, and people fell suffocating in the path of the inferno. The carnage was unequalled in the pre-atomic age.

In their shelter, Lucia and her parents survived – though her father's fellow home guards on duty that night all perished, along with 25,000 other civilians.

There was only one hope to escape the ongoing firestorm consuming the streets after the bombers had left. So the family made for the city zoo, devastated by the raids but with a small lake forming a barrier to the encroaching flames. Unfortunately, escaped wild animals like snakes and crocodiles encircled their overcrowded haven until two days later, when the city beyond became habitable.

BELOW: The ruins of Dresden after the Allied bombing raid of 13 February 1945.

EVENING STANDARD / GETTY IMAGES

Eventually, the firestorm abated and they were able to return home. But there were no valuables to recover. Their house had been obliterated along with all the roads around it. They could not even identify the street where they had lived.

Her parents told Lucia that she must escape Dresden as the Russians began to close in. She was deeply reluctant to leave, but her mother and father declared they had to stay to do what they could for the city. They would join her in Munich, they added.

As she left them amidst the ruins of their life, the still glowing city smouldered all around. It was a 17-day march through streams of refugees heading westward and danger lurked everywhere. Pockets of war-weary Red Army troops eager to avenge the horrors of their homeland stalked Lucia. Several times, she saw young women dragged away by drunken soldiers, but she evaded capture. Until one day, along with a gaggle of other women, she was dragged into a hut by three big men. Here, one by one, the victims were raped. Lucia hid under a bed, hardly daring to breathe for 24 hours and hoping to postpone her fate.

Suddenly, a heavily intoxicated Russian crashed to the floor and rolled towards her. His eyes made brief contact with hers before they swiftly fluttered into unconsciousness. Breathing heavily now, Lucia edged sideways out from beneath the bed and ran for her life, hoping that none of the other men had the energy to chase her. Happily, they did not and she made it safely to Munich the following week.

For Lucia, more fortunate than most of Dresden's inhabitants, the worst seemed over. Munich was in the west, and was taken without much of a fight by the Allies weeks later. Dresden, meanwhile, fell to the Russians, becoming part of the post-war Soviet bloc. Lucia never returned to her home city. Instead, she befriended a British soldier, and he brought her back to his home in Cheshire as his wife.

Settling into a very different world in post-war Britain, Lucia became a housewife and her husband took an office job in Birkenhead. Then, just

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three years later, in the summer of 1949, something extraordinary happened.

"It was a very humid day," she told me, in her German-accented English. "A fierce thunderstorm was raging. I was scared, as it reminded me of the bombing. But I was doing the ironing to take my mind off these thoughts."

Suddenly, there was a ringing sound and instinctively she went to pick up the telephone with her left hand while still ironing with her right. It was her husband calling.

"I love you," he whispered, very softly and sounding far away.

"Where are you?" she pleaded.

There was no reply, just a gentle hissing as his voice drifted away.

Then, to her horror, she realised something. In Dresden, her father had been able to afford a phone. But she, now married to a modestly paid worker, could not. Her hand was holding empty air.

Shaking her head as thunder rumbled outside, Lucia dismissed this bizarre episode and tried to get on with her work. But a little later there was a knock at the door. It was a policeman who, after asking her name, asked to come inside and for her to sit down.

"I have some awful news," he said slowly.

Her husband had encountered a burglar on his way out of the office. The crook had a gun and fired this at close range. As the thief fled, help was quickly summoned, but her husband had died on his way to hospital just over an hour earlier – at the moment she had taken that call on a telephone that did not exist.

There was a crackling sound and a ball of light appeared in the window

Understandably, Lucia fell into a deep depression at a further tragedy in such quick succession, but three weeks later – during another thunderstorm – she felt that buzzing in her head again, realising this time that it could not be a phone. There was a crackling sound, her fine hair stood on end and a brilliant ball of light now appeared inside her window frame. As she stared, it vanished, but she knew this was not ball lightning or a UFO. It was her husband, urging her to survive.

Lucia put her life back together and remarried a decade later. This husband had also died by the time we met, but they had 16 years together and her daughter from that marriage visited her in the hospital.

ABOVE: Bodies in the street after the allied fire bombing of Dresden.

She was aware that her mum had 'odd' experiences, but not much more.

A tenacious Lucia soon recovered from the biopsy and now waited to see if she had cancer. I asked if thunderstorms were the key to her experiences and she remarked that she knew when they were about to strike as her head tingled in that same odd way.

Several days later, I was on the point of being discharged and had been moved out of this side room into a more general area for patients needing less care. Lucia scurried to my bedside and told me that there was going to be a big storm. Outside it was a warm, sunny day – no hint of bad weather. Yet she was absolutely right. A major storm raged over the Wirral that night and I smiled at this small vindication of her story.

The following morning she came back to my bedside wearing a huge smile. "My husband came to see me last night during the storm". I struggled to recall if she had married a third time as only her daughter and son-in-law were visiting. But she chuckled – "No, my second husband who died from cancer. He came for me to go with him. I told him no!"

Lucia described how the storm awoke her and she started to feel unusual. Time stretched out, everything went still and quiet and, while fully aware that she was in the hospital room, husband number two was beside the bed staring at the window. "He was there," she pointed, as I went back with her to the side room we had shared. "He looked real and solid and there was a warm glow around him. He wore a suit that was his favourite in life." He said nothing, but she knew what he wanted.

She explained to me that her daughter was childless but she 'knew' a pregnancy would come. Lucia had every intention of seeing that grandchild.

Later that day, as I sat by her bedside chatting, her daughter arrived and looked mildly bemused as Lucia repeated this latest account with animated expressions.

I tried to suggest that it might have been a dream brought on by the storm. She shook her head slowly and said firmly: "It was no dream. It was real. I know what happened."

Next morning she got the biopsy results. There was no cancer. She could go home.

Lucia did get her grandchild. And she lived long into her 90s. Maybe she is finally reconciled with the many ghosts from her past. FT

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Atlantean brass

JERRY GLOVER melds a year's worth of extraordinary discoveries in the field of ancient metallurgy, considering how they reflect on the subject of OOPARTS.

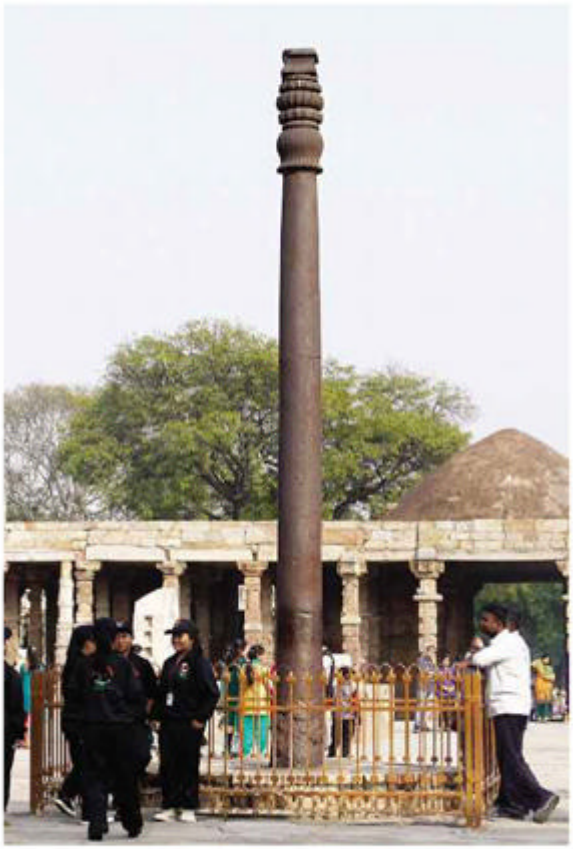
JERRY GLOVER is a freelance writer with a special interest in esoteric, symbolic, and ancient enigmata. He has contributed to *Fortean Times* since 2001, and plans to continue doing so.

In January, the legend of Atlantis received some apparent validation from tenured archæology with the news from Sicily's Superintendent of the Sea Office of the underwater discovery of orichalcum, a hitherto unknown metal previously named by Plato as cladding the wall of the island's acropolis.[1] The evocation of Atlantis ensured a wide coverage that broke into mass media in many languages. Yet this is just the latest, and arguably least significant, discovery in about a year's worth of ancient metal finds which are revolutionising our appreciation of ancient technology and sharpening the hazily-defined realm of Out of Place Artefacts (OOPARTS).

Of fabulous orichalcum ('mountain copper'), 39 ingots of the metal come from a wreck arriving at the Greek colony of Gela from Ægean Greece in c. 550-500 BC.[2] The name comes from the ingots' composition – roundly proportioned as three-quarters copper to a quarter of zinc with traces of nickel, lead and iron – a form of brass that accords with a later Roman derivation (aurichalcum) for certain coins. In the period leading up to Plato's Atlantis texts (c. 360 BC) Assyrian tablets from c. 650 BC mention naturally-occurring 'mountain copper'.[3] Hesiod provides the earliest specific naming of Plato's metal in his hymn *To Aphrodite* and possibly *The Shield of Heracles* from c. 630 BC,[4] and Greek mythology attributes the invention of orichalcum to Cadmus, the Phœnician prince who founded Thebes. The Atlantean link to the Gela wreck is not really helpful since Plato did not specify its composition, only mentioning how it was mined on Atlantis, where for its fire-like sparkle its preciousness was second only to gold.[5]

Sicily-is-Atlantis proponent Thorwald Franke[6] rejects the Gela discovery due to the absence of oreichalkos both in Solon's original account, and – says Franke – for the Saitic Egyptians who started the legend. "From the end of Atlantis to Solon's time," Franke writes to me, "the meaning of the (Egyptian!) word in the Egyptian records was forgotten... orichalcum can be understood as a mere descriptive name for something not known... We do not know which Egyptian word was written in the Saitic papyrus, yet we know that the priest did not understand it. It was only a name for him, so he translated it with a descriptive word." [7] But as an alloy from the early first millennium BC, could the orichalcum of Plato's Atlantis be one of the strongest clues to an influence much closer to home in Plato's time and location?

Interpretations of Atlantean orichalcum abound, with much lustre generated by tumbaga, a gold-copper-silver alloy widely used by pre-Columbian cultures for sacred objects. The evocation of Atlantis in the announcement of this discovery underscores how few legends gleam more than its crafty alloying of mythology, tragedy, history, and allegory. Indeed, it is the only ancient legend that the gatekeepers of the mass media seem to pay attention to these days, so any opportunity to mention it, however tenuous, is seized on. Where there's Atlantis, there's brass.



BELOW: The Iron Pillar in Delhi remains mysterious despite being scientifically investigated.

Over in the eastern Mediterranean, November produced a couple of surprises. The world's most scrutinised OOPART, the Antikythera Mechanism, yielded-up another secret: the prediction of a solar eclipse that occurred on 12 May 205 BC. [8] The accuracy of this prediction matches Babylonian mathematical astronomy based on observations, rather than Hellenistic Greek astronomy, hamstrung by its idealised cosmology. The redating of the mechanism to 200 BC based on this might have a bearing on who made it. Hipparchus is believed to have first developed a reliable way of predicting eclipses, drawing on a close understanding of Babylonian astronomy. He also lived on Rhodes where the mechanism is thought to have been made (from associated ceramic finds). Since the only certain date of Hipparchus is 127 BC, after which he was working on calculations, either his deduced lifetime dates of c. 190-120 BC might have to be revised, or else the inventor was an as-yet unknown genius (or college) on whose shoulders Hipparchus stood. A Babylonian on Rhodes? Another expedition to the Anikythera wreck is planned for this summer.

In October, the Wiltshire Museum in Devizes opened new galleries to display treasures from the sacred landscape of Stonehenge. This also marked an extremely rare event: the possible resolution of a long-standing mystery from the early Bronze Age. It concerned the gold dagger found in the Bush Barrow by William Cunningham in 1808. Before falling to bits (but not before being painted), the handle was decorated with up to 140,000 gold studs, each almost as fine as a human hair. Made centuries before the first magnifying glass, it is one of the most phenomenal achievements of craftsmanship from antiquity (along with the lozenge and other gold objects found beside it). But how was it done and by whom? Only children or myopic adults, we learn, would have had the eyesight and the dexterity to make them, permanently damaging their eyesight in the process. The museum director compared the work to modern forced child labour [9] – but how do we know that it wasn't one of the most esteemed things a person could do? As for microscopic work, Robert Temple has found many ancient lenses going back to 3300 BC, usually not displayed in museums, or incorrectly labelled.[10] Could one of these have aided the dagger's craftsman? This possibility has not

JERRY GLOVER

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yet been considered, so the officially endorsed theory of child labour suggests that, until an ancient lens is found in the vicinity of Stonehenge, this case will remain closed.

Last year's announcements of at least four major metallurgical discoveries pushed back the horizons of this technology in distinct cultures deeper into the past. At Baffin Island in Arctic Canada a smelting crucible and traces of copper alloys confirmed Viking metallurgy in that region between c. AD 1000 and 1400. Not only is this the earliest high-temperature nonferrous metalworking in the New World north of Mesoamerica, its uncovering at the second confirmed Viking settlement in Canada opens a way to a previously unknown transatlantic trade network between Viking seafarers and Native Americans. [11] This seems to make somewhat moot the news from six months earlier that the Vinland Map, a purported 15th century Norse *mappa mundi* depicting 11th century Norse transatlantic voyages, is undoubtedly fraudulent. [12] Fake or not, the Vikings were in North America by AD 1000; the physical evidence for this grows yearly. If the Vinland Map is a fake, it's a most prescient one, even more phenomenal than if it was 'genuine'.

A tiny copper awl in a woman's grave at Tel Tsaf in Israel made in 4600 BC (at the latest) is now the oldest metal object in the Middle East. [13] Also from a woman's grave, cylindrical tin studs from the Whitehorse Hill burial on Dartmoor supports the assumption, long-suspected from the many menhirs and mining activity in the region, that the area's inhabitants around 1900-1500 BC were involved in the metal trade, possibly in exchange for Baltic amber beads, also unearthed in the same grave. Furthermore, turquoise glass beads from an extravagant Bronze Age female burial in Denmark were found to originate in Egypt and Mesopotamia around 1400-1100 BC. More ancient long-distance trade suggests links between the Egyptian and Nordic solar cults.[14]

My vote for the most intriguing metallic discovery announced last year goes to a piece of tinfoil used to wrap a figurine and a ring from eastern Serbia. Made of tin-bronze, these tiny objects are epochal game-changers in the history of technology in a way comparable to the Antikythera Mechanism, for these alloys from c. 4650 BC do not reemerge for at least another 1,500 years. They underline how the Old European cultures from which they emerged reached great technological proficiency before undergoing disruption and decline, their skills lost; though they may have paved

MARCUS CYRON

ABOVE: This tiny copper awl, found in a woman's grave in Israel, is the oldest metal object ever found in the Middle East.

LEFT: The Antikythera Mechanism; a new expedition to the wreck site is planned this year.

The pillar is a totem to lost knowledge and the fragility of progress

the way for the early Mesopotamian state-society cultures that emerged from the interim 'Mythological Age' (archæologically, the Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age).

Towards the start of this eventful year, I fulfilled a long-held ambition to visit the Iron Pillar in Delhi, a seven-ton marvel that, all sources considered, stands in an OOPART borderland; scientifically investigated and yet still deeply mysterious after more than 1,600 years, a totem to lost knowledge and the fragility of progress. The common belief that the pillar is rust-free is only figuratively true as a 'passive' rust layer, 1/20th of a millimetre thick, covers its upper surface. Debate over this exceptional resistance to corrosion divides into two main camps, environmental and material.[15] Delhi's is the finest example of three iron pillars that still stand in India outside temples. Research in 2013 into another iron pillar at Karnataka shows how its excessive corrosion is saline-driven as it is only on the surface facing towards the Arabian Sea.[16] The material school cites the high amount of phosphorus in the Delhi pillar.

The corrosion question is now only a mystery of specialist technical interest along with the method of making >99% pure iron.[17] The great remaining mystery is the one that most struck me on seeing the pillar up close. How were iron lumps smoothly forge-welded so that the pillar's surface looks so smooth and unwelded, appearing to be a single piece (apart from the base, which looks like plasticene)? These are secrets known only to the tribal smiths in the jungles of Orrisa and Madhaya Pradesh.[18]

If not discovered by specialists, some of this past year's discoveries would languish in the cabinet of Out of Place Artefacts. What other OOPARTS stand a chance of being subject to the same level of analysis and repatriated into History? Or is the pace of discovery rendering our previous assumptions about ancient technological capabilities so quaint that the OOPART category itself is rapidly becoming obsolete? FT

FOOTNOTES

1 Original report (Italian): tinyurl.com/o2l22h2

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3 J Bayley: "The Production of Brass in Antiquity with Particular Reference to Roman Britain" in Craddock (ed.) *2000 Years of Zinc and Brass* (British Museum 1990).

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7 Author correspondence, 14-15 Jan 2015.

8 Christian Carman & James Evans: "On the epoch of the Antikythera mechanism and its eclipse predictor", *Archive for the History of Exact Sciences* 68:6, pp.693-774: tinyurl.com/oubr2dr

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11 tinyurl.com/lbkkpkh. Paper: tinyurl.com/n5d8984

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14 tinyurl.com/k6zdt97

15 iupac.org/publications/ci/2005/27 06/3_veazey.html // tinyurl.com/ptxourv

16 tinyurl.com/lj6dxcv

17 The American Rolling Mill Company claims to be the first to develop 99.85% pure iron, 0.13% purer than the Delhi Pillar.

18 Hari Bhardwa: *Aspects of Ancient Indian Technology* (Motilal Banarsidass 1979, pp. 163-5).

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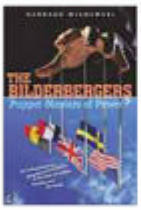
An unknown nobody's legacy

Only 100 or so people know what goes on in this annual network 'n' chat opportunity, but the tin-hat brigade's conspiracy theories may not be 100 per cent barking mad



The Bilderbergers – Puppet-Masters of Power?

An Investigation into Claims of Conspiracy at the Heart of Politics, Business and the Media

Gerhard Wisnewski

Clairview Books 2014

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Only a few years ago, if you had tried the Google search term 'Bilderberg', you'd have got nothing except for the website of a rather exclusive hotel in Oosterbeck, a suburb of the Dutch town of Arnhem made famous by a particularly bloody and unsuccessful battle of the Second World War. Try it now and you'll get nearly seven million hits, including the official website of the shadowy organisation itself.

While the vast majority of those hits will direct you to unashamed conspiracy websites, the respectable media are also well represented. There's even a Wikipedia entry, though one has to say that, considering we're talking about the most famous cabal of the rich and powerful on the planet, the article has all the excitement and sex appeal of flock wallpaper.

Bilderberg's journey from the lunatic fringes of conspiracy theory to the margins of the mainstream media is due in large part to the attentions and efforts of a small group of writers and journalists, perhaps most notably Daniel Estulin, who felt that the group deserved to be rather better known. After all, if you appear to be running the world, you'd expect that one or two people would be interested in your activities.

Despite the intermittent glare of publicity, we still don't know a great deal about the inner workings of the Bilderberg Club. Once a year, a hundred or so of the world's movers and shakers turn up at the same hotel for a couple of days of discussion and networking; they are surrounded by a ring of expensive security and, no, they don't give interviews. Instead, the rumour mill provides us with something that approximates to information.

Since Estulin published his book, the *True Story of the Bilderberg Group*, in 2007, quite a few books, of varying quality, have appeared. The two themes common to all these books are ignorance and influence: no one (apart from, one assumes, at least some of the Bilderbergers) knows what they do and why they do it, although everyone has a good time guessing; but everything they do has a disproportionate influence on world events, from the formation of the EU to the great financial crisis of 2008, from dirty little wars in places very few of us have ever heard of to the biggest and bloodiest conflicts of modern times – Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria.

Wisnewski has been tracking the Bilderbergers for the last 10 years. This book was originally published in Germany in 2010, and consequently some of it is out of date, notably those chapters that deal with the cloak of silence in the mainstream media. But it is full of interest

> **"Some of the speculation belongs to that category of thought termed 'wishful linking'"**

nonetheless, firstly because he goes further than Estulin in his speculations (some of them based on tantalisingly good snippets of evidence) about the origins of the Bilerberg group; and secondly because while his book is focused on the involvement of German politicians and industrialists, it offers an intriguing prospect of what the shadowy influences of an international cabal can mean for any country.

In particular, he digs really deeply into the origins of Bilderberg, identifying the small group of people who took the idea and turned it into the clandestine celebrity we all know and hate. Estulin was vague about the people who started it all, or at least about the grey eminences who really started it all, but Wisnewski gives us names, and one name in particular: Joseph Hieronim Retinger. If you had heard this name before reading this review, then your tinfoil hat is tuned to a much higher frequency than mine.

If Wisnewski is to be believed, then Retinger was one of the most influential nobodies of the 20th century; no one has heard of him, but he seems to have known absolutely everyone who mattered in post-war Europe and the USA. And he apparently had instant access to all the major centres of power in that paranoid post-war world. Somehow this Machiavellian go-between managed to set up the apparatus of what Wisnewski calls the 'international elephants' club' that is Bilderberg, without anyone noticing.

Enter the Jesuits. No international conspiracy worth its weight in worry can afford to leave them out, of course; but Wisnewski weaves a compelling web of possibility around the Vatican's own grey eminences. At times, a reader might be forgiven for thinking that he has a bit of a thing about God's weirdest little soldiers (there is a lot of material from Ignatius Loyola's training manual), but to be fair to Wisnewski, much of what he comes up with is plausible; certainly as plausible as any other theory about the Bilderbergers. Some of the speculation belongs in that category of thought that the writer and journalist Richard Bellfield has rather neatly termed 'wishful linking', but there is enough substance here to make one think.

Wisnewski's personal experiences on the trail of the elusive rulers of the Universe are every bit as entertaining as Jon Ronson's; he is accosted by glamorous Greek policewomen; goes on a hunt for Rockefeller's swimming trunks; inadvertently takes part in a demonstration by Greek communists that paints the security apparatus in a comically bad light. Through it all, he maintains the stance of a bemused ingénu in the corridors of power and corruption; his exaggeratedly polite email exchanges with captains of German industry could be a dialogue between

Continued on p60

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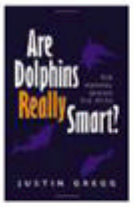
They call him Flipper...

Superb popular science writing strips away anthropomorphised cetacean mythology to reveal a remarkably self-aware creature



Are Dolphins Really Smart?

The Mammal Behind the Myth

Justin Gregg

Oxford University Press 2015
Hb, 320pp, ind, refs, £9.99, ISBN 9780199681563
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

Although Justin Gregg challenges some preconceptions in *Are Dolphins Really Smart?*, it's a testament to his skill as writer that none of cetaceans' lustre wears off. The book is a masterpiece of popular science writing and a contender for my book of the year.

Intelligence, Gregg remarks, "is an abstract and amorphous construct". For instance, intelligence correlates poorly with brain size. The veined octopus, despite "a brain smaller than a Dolphin's eyeball", uses tools with a sophistication that rivals some cetaceans. A human brain weighs about 1,500g and, as Bruce Hood noted (*The Domesticated Brain,* Pelican 2014) has shrunk by about the size of a tennis ball in the last 20,000 years. Bottlenose dolphins (1,824g), African elephants (4,783g) and sperm whales (8,028g) have larger brains than humans. But after allowing for body size, the brain size of some dolphins – including the bottlenose – is second to humans and exceeds some other primates. Despite intensive research, biologists have yet to identify anatomical features that "adequately explain the nature of human cognition, consciousness, or the specifics of our intelligence". And researchers have studied human brains in far more detail than any Cetacean's central nervous system.

Gregg explores other surrogates for intelligence, such as cetacean 'culture'. Stories abound of dolphins helping swimmers or "grieving", which help engender an impression of a 'culture' of altruism, peacefulness and care giving. Orca 'grandmothers' – who have passed the menopause – still aid their male offspring's survival, in ways we don't fully understand. On the other hand, bottlenose dolphins kill harbour porpoises half their size and indulge in infanticide to make the mother receptive for mating. Furthermore, while anthropologists and biologists can't agree on a definition of culture, social learning seems to be key. Some cetaceans transmit information by social learning – such as using a sponge as a tool, certain hunting techniques, vocal dialects of Orca or signature whistles by bottlenose dolphins.

Whether such vocalisations constitute language is another vexed question. Research published between the hardback and paperback editions of this book found that dolphins recall signature whistles for more than 20 years. Gregg concludes that though dolphins communicate, they don't use language in the 'human' sense. Their linguistic ability is similar to chimpanzees. He notes that we need to "retire" the idea of dolphin language and focus on their other forms of communication.

As Gregg shows, our traditional view of animal intelligence is "increasingly out of step with the rapid pace with which the vanguard of science penetrates the mysteries of the animal mind". Indeed, "nearly every trait that we consider intelligent in dolphins has been discovered to a lesser or greater extent in other species", including bears, fish and insects. Ravens, for example, use "mental awareness" and "insight" to solve problems; an observation that provoked resistance in the scientific community, according to *National Geographic* (January 1999). We can accommodate reasoning apes and cetaceans. But, *NG* notes, "the possibility that some raucous featherhead might have [reasoning ability] threatens to upend centuries of grand assumptions about humanity". Further study may find that skills such as tool use, social learning and numeracy are fairly common among animals, Gregg notes.

Gregg suggests we have learnt "an awful lot about the nature of the dolphin mind, but we don't yet know enough to speak confidently about what is going on inside their heads". Almost all the evidence comes from studies of a small number of bottlenose dolphins. However, we know little about many of approximately 80 species of cetaceans worldwide and about 27 species in the European Atlantic alone. Often – possibly because they live in deep water or are relatively unobtrusive – we've learnt the little we know from a few strandings.

You may never be able to Doolittle with Flipper. Yet dolphins seem able to form abstract generalisations. They can recognise that three dots are fewer than seven, that an out of sight object continues to exist. They live in "unusually complex social structures, have emotions," display self-awareness and "engage in a form of social learning that fits some definitions of culture". Dolphins' cognitive abilities are "more similar to humans and other primates than one might expect of an aquatic mammal that evolved from a mammalian linage that split from primates eons ago". By dispelling the myths surrounding these iconic animals, Gregg shows just how remarkable cetaceans are.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict
IMPRESSIVE AND FASCINATING POPULAR SCIENCE WRITING **9**

Continued from p59

Voltaire's Candide and Goethe's Mephistopheles.

Has Gerhard Wisnewski made us better informed and equipped to deal with the people who are running the show? I think he has. But better is a relative term; the Bilderberg Club is still a disturbingly dark centre of power in an increasingly spot-lit world, and I am keeping my tinfoil hat somewhere handy just in case.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict
BREAK OUT THE TIN FOIL, CHAPS – 'THEY' ARE AFTER US AFTER ALL... **8**

The Secret Space Age

Secret Space Programs, Breakaway Civilizations, Nazi UFOs, SDI and *Alternative Three*

Olav Philips

Adventures Unlimited Press 2015
Pb, 256pp, ind, £15.99, ISBN 9781939149428
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.99

The Secret Space Age by Olav Philips is the perfect companion piece to Anglia Television's 1977 *Alternative 3*.

Originally broadcast on 20 June, the end credits made it clear that the special episode of 'Science Report' was originally intended for broadcast on 1 April. This, combined with an interview with fictitious moon-walking astronaut 'Bob Grodin', made it clear that *Alternative 3* was a late April Fool's Day joke. Despite this, the *War of The Worlds* style spoof duped many viewers into believing it was a real exposé of a looming environmental cataclysm and a covert joint US–Russian space programme to colonise Mars, beginning with a manned mission to the red planet in 1962!

In the wake of Pentagon hacker Gary McKinnon's comments to journalist Jon Ronson about "Non-Terrestrial Officers" and "fleet-to-fleet transfers" in 2005, conspiracy theories about such a secret space programme have become increasingly popular on the Internet. In his captivating book, Philips builds a thought-provoking case for the existence of such a clandestine programme,

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with chapters covering the possibility of a breakaway human civilisation underground or in outer space, Nazi flying saucers and the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI, better known as 'Star Wars') first proposed by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. The author admits that *Alternative 3* is science fiction or 'mockumentary'; however, this doesn't mean the television spoof should be treated with the same amount of scepticism as the spaghetti-tree segment shown on *Panorama* in 1957.

Despite a few typos, *The Secret Space Age* is a well researched book that should draw in even the most sceptical of readers with its conspiratorial dot connecting. Read with an open mind, it breathes new life into an old subject which is often too quickly dismissed.

Richard Thomas

Fortean Times Verdict
A GOOD COMPANION PIECE TO THE CULT TELEVISION SPOOF **8**

Spirit Possession and the Origins of Christianity

Stevan Davies

Bardic Press 2014
Pb, 328pp, notes, bib, ind, £16.00, ISBN 9781906834197
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.00

The first thing to note is that this book is a repackaging of the author's earlier book *Jesus the Healer* with a couple of additional essays related to his theme.

Stevan Davies argues that Early Christianity had little or nothing to do with the teachings of Jesus.

Instead it was all to do with his power as a spirit-possessed healer and exorcist, and after his death with the disciples' continuation of this possession after Pentecost.

Throughout his book he makes much of psychiatric theories, particularly the concept of dissociative identity disorder – which he repeatedly calls by its outdated name multiple personality disorder.

In places the book is careless in its dogmatic approach. For example, he states without any argument that John's Gospel and large parts of Matthew and Luke are "fictitious". While this can certainly be argued, it needs substantiation rather than statement. Similarly he tells us at one point that Luke's Gospel was "quite likely" written by a woman, but doesn't give any support for this. It's long been accepted that Luke and Acts were written by the same person, but Davies contends (again without giving us any evidence) that Acts was written first, then Luke as a sort of prequel, without the first two infancy chapters. There's yet more assertion rather than argument when he tells us late in the book that the phrase "kingdom of God" refers to a trance state.

On the other hand he does demonstrate quite easily that "the great diversity in resurrection narratives shows that there was no established account of the resurrection in the early church". He also takes quite a fortean stance at one point, saying that "a supernatural event can be a historical event with a supernatural explanation attached to it". In other words, while we may not accept that people rise from the dead we need to pay attention to "the belief that people rise from the dead".

At times he's rather too dismissive of more conventional interpretations, such as when he states: "Scholarship, theological and historical both, is in a state of near conceptual chaos regarding the message of Jesus the Teacher: countercultural wisdom sage, peasant Jewish Cynic, Pharisaic rabbi, antipatriarchal communalist, eschatological preacher." Yes, there are different scholarly views and emphases on who and what Jesus was, but that's hardly "chaos", it's simply what scholarship is all about – and in any case, Davies is just adding yet another interpretation into the mix.

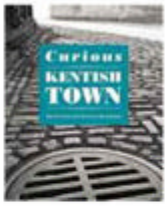
There are some interesting ideas in this book, but the overall thesis isn't convincing, and this isn't helped by the author's style of argument. Finally, the lack of an index renders the book of limited scholarly value.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
INTERESTING BUT FLAWED NEW TAKE ON CHRISTIANITY'S ORIGINS **4**

Revolting past

Choose between a century of radical London and more localised enthusiasms



Rebel Footprints

A Guide to Uncovering London's Radical History

David Rosenberg

Pluto Press 2015
Pb, 307pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £6.99, ISBN 9780745334097
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £6.99

Curious Kentish Town

Martin Plaut & Andrew Whitehead

Five Leaves Publications 2015
Pb, 91pp, illus, £7.95, ISBN 9781910170069
AVAILABLE FROM WWW.FIVELEAVES.CO.UK

David Rosenberg's history and walking guide to radical London is equal parts wonderful and frustrating: some events and people mentioned in passing richly deserve greater coverage, and the book deals only with the period 1830–1930, so the Peasants' Revolt, the often maligned Gordon Riots (read John Nicholson's *The Great Liberty Riot* [BM Bozo, 1985] as a corrective to Christopher Hill's tut-tutting *King Mob*) and other instances of the great British public revolting are outside its remit.

Annie Besant, whom *FT* readers will know of because of her involvement with Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy, started off as a radical campaigner, involved in the match girls' strike. Also name-checked is Thomas Britton, "the musical small coal man [charcoal seller]", who held weekly musical soirées attended by those brave enough to climb the outside ladder to his house. His collection of occult and Rosicrucian books was as famous as his concerts. He died after being frightened by a ventriloquist.

At the beginning of the period covered, the *Poor Man's Guardian* ignored the four pence stamp duty on newspapers that ensured information was ringfenced from the poor, and publicised Feast Day, its alternative to Fast (or Farce) Day. Instead of not eating to stop the advance of cholera (eh?), the poor strolled around the more prosperous parts of London, in a 19th century *dérive*. The clear maps in this book mean readers can do their own *dérive* through places where rebellious thoughts were hatched.

Curious Kentish Town is a more localised London history. It covers the same territory as Gillian Tindall's more sober *The Fields Beneath*, but extracts the area's quirkier events, people and animals, including the memorial to Boris the Cat and the plaque to Willie Rushton in Mornington Crescent station. Treats include the story of the horse tunnels and the baths where "an expert troupe of ladies" performed "ornamental swimming and motionless floating". Exciting stuff.

William Darragh

Fortean Times Verdict
DIFFERENT BUT LOVELY HISTORY BOOKS FOR LONDON WALKERS **8**

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It's not a UFO religion

The author's misunderstanding of his subject starts with the book's subtitle, but he humanises some of the cult members

Heaven's Gate

America's UFO Religion

Benjamin E Zeller

New York University Press 2014

Pb 287pp, illus, bib, ind, $26.00, ISBN 9781479881062

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.99

Religious studies scholar Benjamin E Zeller does not address what a 'UFO religion' is in his study of Heaven's Gate, a tiny sect which ended in the suicide of 39 members in San Diego, California, in March 1997.

Zeller claims that the group was influenced by 'ufology' (not defined), and by Christian and New Age elements, which he examines more authoritatively. 'UFO' is a term intended to convey the notion that the object of the report has not been identified and can only be theorised about. If ufologists have never fully agreed what UFOs are, saucerians – the foot soldiers of the contactee movement – have never had that problem: flying saucers, which are not UFOs by definition, are piloted by angelic space people on a cosmic mission of mercy.

For all practical purposes, ufologists drove contactees out of their midst as early as the mid-1950s. Even so, contactees such as George Adamski, Daniel Fry and George Van Tassel incorporated concepts from UFO literature into their evolving mythology and provided contexts – space people's purposes – for the understanding of reports that puzzled ufologists. None of this is true of Heaven's Gate, whose relationship to ufology from all apparent evidence, Zeller notwithstanding, is undetectable. It had only marginal links to historic saucerianism.

The word 'contactee' shows up once in the text, in a quote from academic Brenda Denzler, who is more informed on these matters than Zeller. "Contactees," she declares, "had their roots not in UFO experience and investigation, but in esoteric groups." There is a fair amount of literature on the conflicting motives of ufologists and saucerians; for example, I wrote about this in my *UFO Encyclopedia* in the 1990s. If we may judge from text and bibliography, Zeller has bothered with none of the relevant materials.

Heaven's Gate was not a 'UFO religion', if such an oxymoronic phenomenon were possible. Nothing in the group's metaphysics, including its conviction that its members would ascend physically or psychically to the 'Next Level', in its parlance, betrays a knowledge of ufology more profound than can be gleaned from exposure to popular culture in the broadest sense.

Heaven's Gate and traditional contactees had in common a certain debt to Theosophy, which is what brought Madame Blavatsky's golden-haired Venusians into the narrative. But for Heaven's Gate, Venusians – who all but defined the saucerian movement in its 1950s/1960s prime – figure only vaguely and remotely. Zeller mentions that co-founder Bonnie Nettles once belonged to a Theosophical séance group that "channeled not only deceased human beings [..] but also extraterrestrials from the planet Venus." Beyond that, his grasp of UFO culture is so uncertain that author and abductee Whitley Strieber is renamed 'Whitney'.

Heaven's Gate absorbed much of its cosmology from SF, specifically *Star Trek*, which is why others have called it a "science fiction religion." A comparison of it and traditional contactee groups would have made an interesting and illuminating chapter, but Zeller would have had to do his homework. From such labours he would have learned, for one thing, that contactees did neither themselves nor their followers any harm to speak of, with the very rare exception (i.e., Gloria Lee's fatal fast at the urging of a channelled friend from Jupiter).

Though Zeller's analysis is skewed and plain wrong in one fundamental aspect, he succeeds in humanising individual Heaven's Gaters. He argues plausibly that members, however tragic and extraordinary the circumstance of their departure from Earth may have been, were spiritual pilgrims akin to many who have wandered the occult landscape over the course of the nation's history. Still, it is hard not to be repelled by an operation whose philosophy, having failed to sell its message to more than a handful, persuaded followers that fulfillment of their goals could be accomplished only by self-murder.

Heaven's Gate serves as an object lesson in the danger of wholesale dismissal of what sociologists of science call "rejected knowledge". Zeller's presumption seems to have been that since ufology has nothing to say, the specifics of its character and history can be ignored except as some vague accumulation of erroneous beliefs about space visitors. If he had paid attention to the not necessarily synonymous social histories of UFOs and flying saucers, he would have had to conjure up a new subtitle. He might also have had something more useful to say about the intersection of grassroots religions and popular beliefs about extraterrestrials.

Jerome Clark

Fortean Times Verdict

INTERESTING TOPIC WHICH THE AUTHOR DOESN'T QUITE GRASP **5**

Trance-Migrations

Stories of India, Tales of Hypnosis

Lee Siegel

University of Chicago Press 2014

Pb, 258pp, illus, $12.50, ISBN 9780226185323 $12.50

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.50

Lee Siegel, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Hawaii, has written 16 stories, gathered together in sections headed either 'For The Reader' or 'For The Listener'. The reader is instructed to read stories silently or aloud – or to listen to another's voice as they read. Reading out loud is intended to create a hypnotic state in the reader and the listener, and this theme of hypnosis and mesmerism permeates the tales, which carry the reader (or listener) up in a dizzying dream state – a whirl of disparate nations, cultures and historical periods, fact and fiction, all with the focal point of Mysterious India.

Siegel employs historical characters in his fictions. Abbé José-Custódio de Faria, a Catholic monk from the Portuguese colony of Goa, one of the founding fathers of modern hypnotism, is here depicted in the salons of 19th century Paris, hypnotising the attractive young women he finds there. James Esdaile, a Scots surgeon in the employ of the East India Company, practises analgesic mesmerism on Bengalis. And Siegel himself appears, as he travels India absorbing its wisdom – hypnosis, magic spells, mantras, tantras, yoga and past-life regression, and musing upon Western encounters with the Mystic East, by way of post-colonial and Orientalism theories.

Trance-Migrations is wittily illustrated with lurid images of Hindu deities, posters for sensational 'sinister-Swami' themed B-movies, and classic 1970s small-ads offering correspondence courses in hypnosis for possibly dubious ends – "say the secret word, snap your fingers – they are HYPNOTIZED and ready to do as you command!"

Recommended.

Chris Josiffe

Fortean Times Verdict

THE WISDOM OF INDIA, WITTILY REIMAGINED **8**

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ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

Mystery Solved

Thor Heyerdahl

Souvenir Press 2014
Pb, 256pp, illus, bib, £20.00, ISBN 9780285642836

It's difficult to remember, at this remove, how Thor Heyerdahl's 1955 visit to Easter Island gripped the collective imagination of the Western world, triggering a popular interest in the archæology of earlier civilisations. To some of us, it was topped only by staying up all night to watch the first Moon landing. "A generation ago," he writes in the introduction, "there were still blank spaces on the map." This re-issue of his various accounts of confronting the mystery of the now-famous *moai*, the giant stone torsos with elongated heads that stare inland across the island, still conveys the eerie thrill of man's first landing on another planet. To Heyerdahl this was just one strand in his search for the cultural remains of the pre-Columbian culture that left huge megalithic structures throughout South America and, he believed, once extended as far as Polynesia. This welcome review comes in a large-format paperback, illustrated in colour throughout.

Sex, Sorcery and Spirit

Jason Miller

New Page Books 2015
Pb, 218pp, $15.99, ISBN 9781601633323

At an early age Jason Miller decided to learn what he could of magical systems from a variety of practitioners, from witchcraft and 'rootwork' to more esoteric beliefs and exotic rituals. We warm towards anyone who lists as his childhood heroes Dr Strange, Mandrake, The Shadow and Dr Doom... Miller, following those comic-book heroes, took the bold step of going to live and study in the Himalayas to undertake initiation into Tantric magic in Nepal. The bulk of this engaging book is a guide for those who wish to practise Tantric and Daoist sex magic, and includes discussion about controlling orgasms, energy channels and centres, elixirs and spells, and imagination exercises with images of gods and spirits. For those less so inclined, Miller is equally erudite about the historical use of sex-magic in both Eastern and Western traditions, acknowledging the role that sex can play on the path to enlightenment. We rather like the story about the Sixth Dalai Lama who worried his advisors by refusing to become a monk, wrote erotic poetry and consorted with maids. Granting their request for reassurance, he invited them to the roof of the Potala and astonished the gathering by pissing over the ramparts onto the roofs below and then apparently sucking it all back up into his penis. He turned to them and said that if they could control their fluids like that, they too could maintain their purity while enjoying sex. On a general level – the only one on which we can judge this – this is a well-written and instructive book. And it comes with a reading list and a clear warning about the dangers of frivolous interest, abandonment to lust or careless rituals.

Death on Mars

John Brandenburg

New Page Books 2015
Pb, 238pp, illus, bib, ind, $15.99, ISBN 9781601633422

Brandenburg – a controlled fusion plasma physicist at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory – argues that there was once a flourishing civilisation on an Earth-like Mars which was wiped out by a series of nuclear disasters that reduced the planet to the cold, red ruin we see now. There is considerable details here including analysis of photographs, conversations (with Richard Hoagland, Carl Sagan *et al*), and much theorising of the conspiracy and cosmological sorts. He ends with a warning that the people of Earth should heed before it is too late: corrupt and secretive governments, inequality and aggression, pollution and poverty, and exploitation of dwindling resources etc may doom this planet to the same fate as Old Mars. The ultimate irony, he says, is that this may be the reason behind Fermi's Paradox: silent, dead planets in a seemingly fertile Universe.

Too Good to be True

Jan Harold Brunvand

WW Norton & Co 2014
Pb, 539pp, illus, $18.95, ISBN 9780393347159

Brunvand's original 1999 survey of 'bar-room tales' and 'urban legends' (ULs) became a best-seller and many of its recorded 'tall stories' have passed into popular culture since being used in movies or TV episodes. He defines them as a genre of modern folklore in which preposterous stories, concisely plotted with no extraneous details, are said to have happened to a friend of a friend (FOAF) or a distant relative, but this revised edition comes with expansions of some topics, sources, a new chapter called 'Bad things happen', a section of parodies of ULs, and another on stories he was once sure were ULs but proved to be 'real life' occurrences, what folklorist and *FT* contributor Bill Ellis called 'ostention'. To confuse matters, some of these ostention stories also turned out to be unreliable. A wonderful book and so very fortean in its themes, examples and discussions.

Inside the Cosmic Mind

Phoebe Wyss

Floris Books 2014
Pb, 223pp, illus, refs, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781782501107

This manifesto on 'archetypal cosmology' claims to present a "new paradigm" but presents as a familiar mash-up of astrology, psychology, numerology, and Egyptian and Greek mythology. The last section is devoted to a single horoscope – that of William Blake – supported by a detailed analysis of his philosophy, writing and artworks. Not everyone's cup of tea, but an earnest attempt at a comprehensive synthesis.

FORTEAN FICTION

Cross Dog Blues

Richard M Brock

Bogie Road Publishing
Pb, 244pp, $13.95, ISBN: 9780991132027

From the blues of the American South grew the popular music of the 20th century, which became a powerful catalyst for racial equality. Was this accidental, or was a mystical seed deliberately planted? Franklyn O'Conner, a 19-year-old white kid from Upstate New York, embarks on his first adventure: to travel alone to the Mississippi Delta in search of his errant blues musician father and "tell him he's an asshole".

Intertwined with Frank's story are the harsh and violent events of a century ago, as the young Charlie Patton struggles to survive the injustices of a Deep South dominated by prejudice and the Ku Klux Klan. Patton's solution is to invent 'Blues Music', which has a mysterious hidden agenda. With the help of Huddie 'Leadbelly' Ledbetter, Blind Lemon Jefferson and Robert Johnson, he sends his covert message out into the world. These two realities catastrophically collide when young Frank teams up with the elderly Furry Jenkins, an itinerant bluesman and rogue. Richard M Brock paints a gripping, funny and often harrowing picture of life in the Delta, then and now.

Artfully combining fact and fiction, this is storytelling at its best, with a plot that surprises at every twist and turn.

Steve Marshall

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FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.

The Falling

Dir Carol Morley, UK 2015

On UK release from 24 April

While cinema can hardly be said to suffer from a shortage of aliens, ghosts or exorcisms, it's rare to find a film exploring the obscurer corners of forteana – so Carol Morley's *The Falling*, which takes an outbreak of mass hysteria in a school as its subject, is of unusual interest. Some of the subjects of Morley's previous work – mostly art-film shorts and sort-of-documentaries – could have been ripped straight from the pages of *FT*: missing people, compulsive disorders, a woman found in her home three years after her death, and even unusual events recorded in newspaper clippings. *The Falling* is an even more ambitious attempt to distil a whole 'genre' of weirdness – mass psychogenic illness, or 'mass hysteria' – into a single, fictional film narrative.

The film is set in a British girls' grammar in 1969, where teenage friends Lydia (Maisie Williams, of *Game of Thrones* fame) and Abbie (newcomer Florence Pugh) rail against the constraints imposed by their teachers and families, read Wordsworth and talk about boys; when a tragic event strikes, Lydia starts going into trance-like states and having fainting fits – triggering a contagion that spreads through the school to the bafflement of the authorities.

The choice of time and place is a smart one: following a group of *jeunes filles en fleurs* caught in this particular moment of socio-cultural change allows not just for multiple interpretations of the outbreak – raging hormones, a revolution in social and sexual mores – but means we get an extra layer of period occult possibilities – Lydia's brother talking about "ley lines" – and even the sense that there's really something rather wonderful and magical about what's happening to these girls.

Morley has done her homework on outbreaks of this sort, but her refusal to pin things down neatly is admirably fortean; this is more *Picnic at Hanging Rock* than sociological textbook (the film stirs memories of other films of the era, too, from If... to *Don't Look Now*). The seductive, off-kilter romanticism Morley brings to the story (leaning heavily on Tracy Thorn's score) makes this a strange and haunting film. OK, it all goes off the boil at the end with a melodramatic twist that seems to have strayed in from another film altogether, but this is still recommended viewing.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
A SUITABLY SWOONY TAKE ON A MASS FAINTING OUTBREAK **7**

Last Knights

Dir Kazuaki Kiriya, Czech Republic/South Korea 2015

On UK release from 17 April

Knights, kings, queens, thrones and games thereof are good business for cinema at the moment, and to that regal gravy carriage this film has been hitched.

Bartok (Morgan Freeman) is a noble lord in a bleak, snowy and undefined land who dares defy Gezza Mott (Askel Hennie), the Emperor's deputy. Gezza Mott, incensed by Bartok's failure to pay homage to him, places him on trial before the Emperor, using his influence to have Bartok's insubordination rewarded with a death sentence. As his trusted knight and Commander, Raiden (Clive Owen) remains loyal to Bartok; however, he is then ordered by the Emperor to be Bartok's executioner. Raiden refuses until Bartok gives the order – one he must obey – and Raiden murders his own master. Gezza Mott's campaign of humiliation continues: Bartok's wife and daughter are kicked out of their home, his knights, including Raiden, disbanded and the Bartok holdings and lands dispersed among others at court. Without a master to serve or an order to follow Raiden slumps into a life of alcohol and despair, which comes to a head when he visits a brothel only to be offered his former master's daughter. Gezza Mott, meanwhile, obsessed with the fear that Raiden will seek revenge, surrounds himself with protection.

What we have thus far is a story of loyalty, honor and justice, but – although it takes its time about it – it turns into a story of vengeance, with Raiden, the fallen warrior whose life we witness falling apart, doing the avenging. The long wait, of course, makes the vengeance all the sweeter when it begins.

The sword fights are fast and lethal, but without blood and without the visual falir I expected from Japanese auteur Kazuaki Kiriya. The multinational cast, every member of which is extremely capable, is never really explained, although with the mix of Samurai, Moors and Knights you'd expect some epic sword play, which never quite materialises. But if you put aside your expectations of action on a grand scale, you might enjoy this exploration of knightly honour and revenge.

Mark McConnell

Fortean Times Verdict
GRIM TALE OF KNIGHTLY HONOUR AND REVENGE **5**

Starry Eyes

Dir Kevin Kolsch, Dennis Widmyer, US 2014

Metrodome, £9.99 DVD

The proverbial film of three thirds, *Starry Eyes* is a psychological horror film that follows aspiring actress Sarah (Alex Essoe) as she tries to land a "gateway role" that will propel her into the big league.

After auditioning for the lead in horror flick "The Silver Scream" Sarah is sucked into a nightmarish world which offers stardom only to those willing to make extreme sacrifices. The film's first third is an engrossing look at the dispriting existence of those on the margins of the film business: waiting tables; rejection; bitchiness; humiliation. The second is surreal, menacing black comedy – prime David Lynch territory – as Sarah is subjected to an increasingly undignified series of auditions culminating in an almost Faustian offer from the producers. Unfortunately in the final third, having carefully built up an atmosphere of dread and disorientation, directors Kevin Kolsch and Dennis Widmyer toss it all away in a sea of blood, gore and violence.

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There is at least an attempt to make a point about identity and naked ambition, and Sarah's spiritual degradation is mirrored in her physical disintegration, but ultimately the film doesn't quite come off; unlike her fingernails. Alex Essoe deserves some sort of award for her performance in a role which really puts her through the wringer to a degree which astonished even this lover of cinema trash.
Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict
NOT SO MUCH MULHOLLAND DRIVE AS OLD KENT ROAD **6**

Remember Me

Dir Ashley Pearce, UK 2014
ITV Studios, £14.99 DVD

A swift DVD release for this TV ghost story, originally broadcast by the BBC in three parts last November. It was promoted as being Michael Palin's return to straight acting but really it belongs to Jodie Comer as Hannah Ward, a young girl on the brink of womanhood who becomes intrigued by Tom Parfitt (Palin), an old man admitted to the care home where she works. On the day he arrives, a social worker plummets to her death from the third floor window of his room – an incident that naturally comes to the attention of the police, in the shape of detective Rob Fairholme (Mark Addy). When Tom goes missing the following day, Hannah begins to look into his case and comes to believe that he is being plagued by a violent spirit from his past.

Remember Me has several things going for it. First, it has an experienced cast: as well as the aforementioned trio there's Mina Anwar, an almost unrecognisable Julia Sawalha (as Hannah's blowsy mother) and Sheila Hancock, so the acting is good. Second, it has a terrific sense of place – specifically the starkly beautiful northeast of England. The latter half is set primarily in Scarborough, which is so photogenic in its faded grandeur that you wonder why it hasn't been used more often. Third, it is at times genuinely creepy. Very little is made explicit, which is commendable, given that suggestion is so often more effective than demonstration. It's the small details that are imbued with menace: a cowrie shell; a dripping tap; a col-

The Reverend's Review

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

RIGOR MORTIS

Dir Juno Mak, Hong Kong 2013
Metrodome, £12.99 (DVD)

BLOOD AND BLACK LACE

Dir Mario Bava, Italy 1964
Arrow Films, £14.99 (Dual Format)

WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS

Dir Jemaine Clement, Taika Wahiti, NZ 2014
Metrodome, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

This month we have three overseas horrors which show that a varied diet of terror makes for a more memorably macabre meal.

First up is *Rigor Mortis*, in which a has-been movie actor checks into a haunted apartment. This Chinese take on a classic horror set-up is both elegant, surreal and spooky. It's a tribute (of sorts) to the riotous *Mr Vampire* movies from the 1980s, where hopping vampires were thwarted by sticky rice. Director Juno Mak fills his cast with *Mr Vampire* alumni, but the pace is the polar opposite of those films: slow, meandering and with minimal hopping action. The new approach will no doubt disappoint fans. Get over it though, and you'll find a weird, tender eeriness at work. There's a lot of CGI, which I normally don't like, but in something this stylised and surreal it seems fitting. The set design's superb too, with grim fortress-style locales and an old seamstress's apartment with a ceiling stuffed with dead flowers. I fear *Rigor Mortis* might suffer the same fate as *Halloween III: Season of the Witch*: a solid movie mauled by comparisons to the franchise it differed from. Yet, it makes a surprisingly thoughtful coda to all those fifth-gear vamp fests.

To Italy next, for the seminal Mario Bava movie *Blood and Black Lace*, whose influence is splattered across the countless *giallo* and slasher movies it inspired. The plot – beautiful young models creatively despatched by a masked killer – is a sturdy enough coathanger for the movie, but the real delight is the hues and textures that hang from it. Bava, a lighting cameraman turned director, spends much of the film showcasing light, colour and movement, with stylised images you could print out and stick on a wall; the stiff handles of a handbag perfectly arching across a distant character; the book-end shots of a swinging unhinged sign and a pendulous telephone. It's Bava's insistence on elevating æsthetics as high as plot that makes it all so rich and influential. Arrow have meticulously restored the film, and it looks magnificent.

Moving to New Zealand we get probably the most accessible film in this month's crop: *What We Do In The Shadows*. It's a *Spinal Tap*-style mockumentary about housemates who happen to be centuries-old vampires. Okay, so the idea isn't exactly groundbreaking, but it's genuinely funny and well observed. Touching, even, as when they have to draw pictures of each other before a big night out, since mirrors are useless, or huddle around Youtube to watch a sunrise. It's got plenty of quotables too: From "Vampires don't do dishes!" to "Leave me to do my dark bidding on the Internet! I'm bidding on a table."

Fortean Times Verdict
THREE TASTY HORROR TREATS FROM AROUND THE WORLD **8**

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lection of sheet music.

On the debit side, the story proceeds at a pace that can only be described as glacial. It does a fine job of establishing credible, engaging characters but it does this so slowly that it risks coming to a full stop. Far too many sequences are replayed multiple times – there are endless shots of the sea – and there is an entire subplot, featuring an Asian neighbour and her sons, which could easily have been omitted in its entirety. Indeed, it may be that director Ashley Pearce eventually realised this himself because those characters are inexplicably missing from the entire second half. I'm sure the intent was to gradually build an atmosphere of dread, as opposed to horror, much as the TV adaptation of Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black* did; but that lasted 90 minutes, and *Remember Me* goes on for twice that length. Sometimes less is more.

It also falls into the trap of telegraphing its scares with musical cues to the extent that it feels as if the director is telling you when you should be frightened rather than letting you decide that for yourself. Nor does it offer anything particularly new in narrative or visual terms. The ghost itself and the associated recurrent water imagery are all too reminiscent of numerous Japanese films, and if you've seen the aforementioned *Woman in Black* or Jack Clayton's masterful *The Innocents* you'll already be familiar with the image of a ghostly figured glimpsed across a lake.

All of this makes it sound as if I didn't enjoy *Remember Me*, which isn't the case – it has much to offer. It's refreshing to see the diverse nature of England, particularly Yorkshire, being reflected in a genre that has traditionally been pretty white. It's good to see that social issues – residential care, single parent families, an ageing population, even immigration and Britain's colonial past – can be integrated into a supernatural tale. It also deals with loss and grief in a sensitive and ultimately moving way.

The outstanding feature though is the performance by Jodie Comer. As far as I can tell this is her first role of any real stature, but she does a terrific job in the crucial central role and more than holds her own in the company of experienced actors. She's one to watch for the future. So, not without issues but recommended if you like atmospheric ghost stories and are prepared to invest three hours of your time, then you may just find yourself falling under its spell.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict
VERY SLOW BUT INTRIGUING ENGLISH GHOST STORY **7**

Attila Marcel

Dir Sylvain Chomet, France 2014

Metrodome, £12.99 DVD

Roald Dahl and John Irving are the two names which come to mind while watching this whimsical French comedy-drama-musical, for it tells the story of Paul, who has more issues than you can shake a stick at. A 33-year-old man-child, he's been mute since the age of two, traumatised by the death of his parents under circumstances he cannot recall, and he's a piano prodigy under the 'care' of his two monstrous aunts. By chance he meets the eccentric lady from the flat below, who by plying him with mushroom tea and madeleines releases deeply buried memories. Those of you who paid attention in your French literature classes will not be surprised to learn that her name is Mme Proust. Yes, it's that sort of film: everyone in it is kooky, and I mean *everyone*. They have personality quirks piled so high the effect is tiresome: for instance, Mme Proust is a ukulele-playing Buddhist eco-warrior who owns an enormous dog which barks only when people leave her flat, which she has turned into a greenhouse. Even the doctor, a tiny part, is a frustrated taxidermist. It was too much for me, although there are one or two terrific sequences, notably a fantasy wrestling bout between Paul's parents which is part fight, part Argentine tango. Writer-director Sylvain Chomet (*Belleville Rendez-Vous*) extracts fine performances from his cast (particularly Guillaume Gouix and Anne Le Ny) but they are smothered by his restless camera and taste for mawkish whimsy.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict
AS SWEET AND INSUBSTANTIAL AS A FRENCH PASTRY **5**

SHORTS

STONEHEARST ASYLUM

In cinemas and available on digital download and premium on-demand from 24 April

Stonehearst Asylum is a lavish, starry expansion of the Edgar Allen Poe tale 'The System of Dr Tarr and Professor Feather.' A young Doctor Newgate arrives at the brooding, mist-covered madhouse to start an apprenticeship under Ben Kingsley's Dr Lamb, who takes a rather left-field approach to mental health. He pities the mad and lets them embrace their delusions; like the patient who thinks he's a stallion and whose cell is kitted out with hay. "Why make a miserable man out of a perfectly happy horse?" asks Lamb; it's a fair question. It's quirky moments like this, along with some gorgeous cinematography, which help the film connect. Yet in the end, despite some tight plotting and a strong cast (Michael Caine and Kat Beckinsale also star) there's something underwhelming about the whole affair. Oddly enough, the far lower budget Seventies flick *Don't Look in the Basement* took the same Poe idea (without credit) and made a far more disturbing and convincing job of it. Yet if you like your gothic filtered through a glossy BBC-style production (and many do), then this may just weave some welcome shadows into your week. **Rev PL** 5/10

ROLLERBALL

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Back in 1975 *Rollerball* was one of those grown-up AA-certificate films I couldn't get into the cinema to see, despite its alluring poster and trailer promising futuristic Seventies ultraviolence. 40 years later, Norman Jewison's dystopian vision of a dehumanising corporate world very like our own – with sport as (literally) an arena in which to demonstrate the ultimate powerlessness of the individual – seems spot-on and bitingly prescient. The game sequences are brilliantly executed and, indeed, pretty vicious for the era, but some of the film's other coolly observed imagery perhaps haunts the imagination even more: the sequence in which a group of chic party guests torch a line of trees with a rocket launcher in the pre-dawn light is an unforgettable, and poetic, evocation of a denatured world. James Caan – so softly spoken you have to strain to hear him at times – is perfect as the media-manufactured sporting 'hero', while John Houseman is equally good as the shadowy mogul pulling his strings. Arrow's Blu-ray release, which comes with some informative extras, makes a good case for *Rollerball* as a genuine, underrated Seventies classic. **DS** 8/10

THE QUESTOR TAPES

Odeon Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD)

This unsuccesful 1974 TV pilot by Gene Rodenberry is about an android searching for its creator. An international group of scientists use the partly-erased magnetic tapes supplied by the creator of the android, Dr Emil Vaslovik, who disappeared some years before, to bring it to life. Eventually, Questor – as the android is called – and one of the scientists set off to England to search for Vaslovik, with the other scientists in pursuit. In places the film is a dry comedy of manners, as Questor, logical and intelligent but without emotions, almost but not quite passes itself off as human. (Questor was supposedly the prototype for Data, who also claimed to be "fully functional", in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.) But the story never really catches the imagination, even (perhaps especially) in its credibility-stretching deus-ex-machina conclusion on Mount Ararat. **David V Barrett** 5/10

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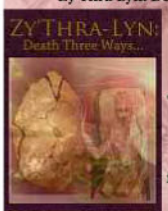

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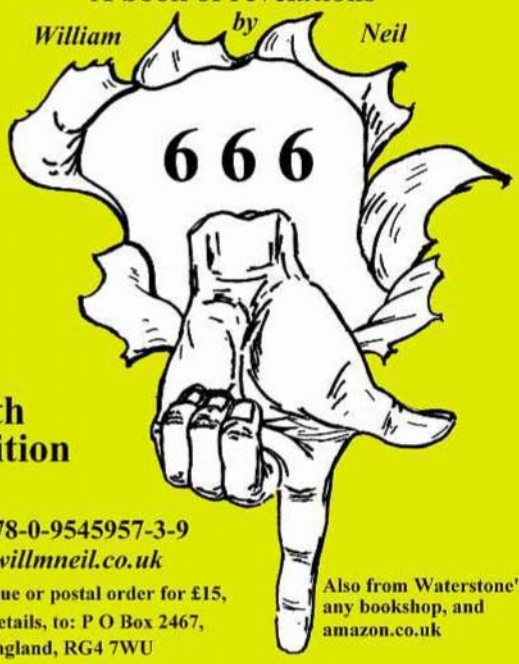

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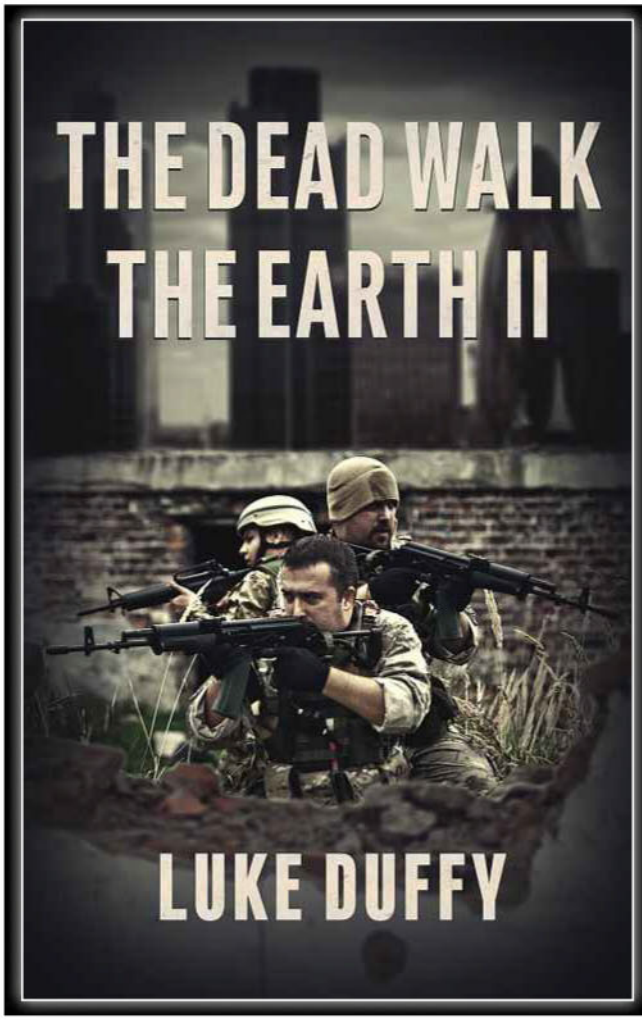

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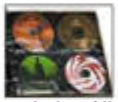

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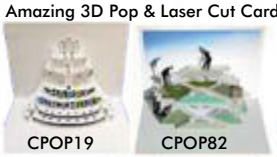

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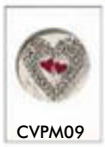

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Dear FT...

letters

Swimming mammals

I was intrigued by Bobby Zodiac's suggestion that the Dingonek of tropical Africa's rivers could have been a jungle walrus [**FT318:74**]. He is correct that pinnipeds are widespread and river dolphins do exist. The Lake Baikal Seal (*Phoca sibirica*) is the only known species of freshwater pinniped and is found hundreds of miles away from the sea in the interior of Russia. Better yet, why couldn't the Dingonek have been a member of the order Sirenia? Manatees are found on the west coast of Africa so why couldn't there have been a species living in Africa's interior? The now-extinct Steller's sea cow (*Hydrodamalis gigas*) was exterminated for its tasty meat by 18th century whalers in the Bering Sea, so perhaps the Dingonek was killed off for the same reason by inhabitants along Africa's river systems.

When Mr Zodiac asked why Bernard Heuvelmans bothered to complicate things by proposing the Dingonek was linked to evolving sabre-toothed cats, it reminded me of how biologist Roy P Mackal suggested in Jerome Clark's *Unexplained* that the White River Monster of Arkansas was a displaced elephant seal. For an elephant seal to have wandered up the Mississippi River into the White River it would have had to swim up the entire coastline of South America and into the Gulf of Mexico to find the mouth of the Mississippi. A more likely candidate for 'Whitey' is the Florida manatee (*Trichecus manatus*), which has been known to have wandered as far west in the Gulf of Mexico as Texas. At the same time, Ivan T Sanderson suggested 'Whitey' was a 'truly gigantic penguin'.

It goes to show that theories from such maverick cryptozoologists as Heuvelmans, Sanderson and Mackal can be just as incongruous as forteana itself.

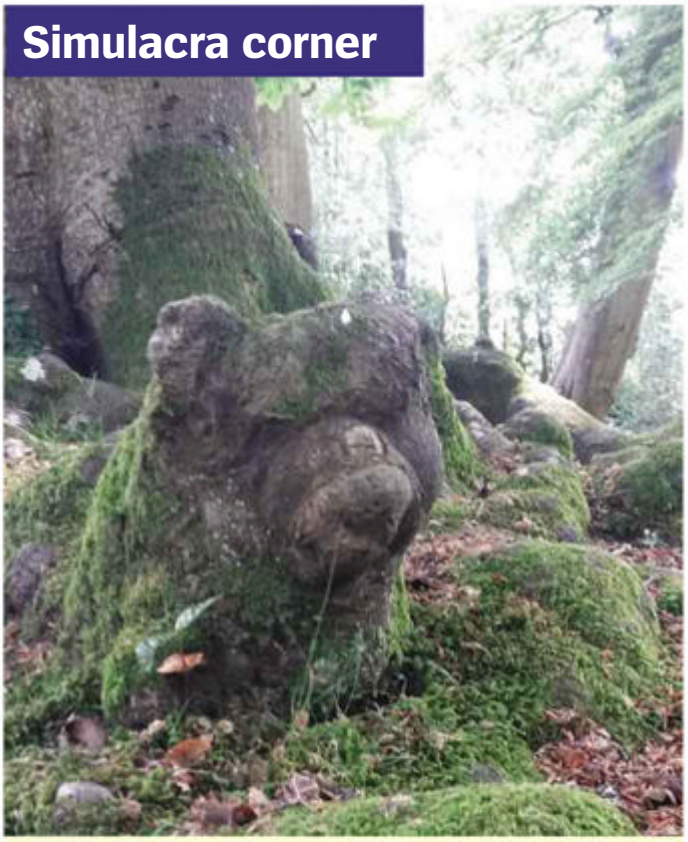
• Nick Warren asked if anyone has ever seen a whalphin ['Cetacean Weirdness' **FT324:72**]. The name 'whalphin' was coined by Hawaii's Sea Life Park a number of years ago when a male false killer whale (*Pseudorca crassidens*) mated with a female bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*). The resulting hybrid had characteristics of both parents. Inasmuch as the false killer whale is actually a member of the dolphin family, this was an example of interspecies breeding. Killer whales, pilot whales, beluga whales and false killer whales are members of the dolphin family, Delphinidæ. The name 'whale' is applied to denote their size. There has never been an example of a true whale breeding with a dolphin.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Several hybrids have been reported between different dolphin species (e.g. bottlenose dolphin x Risso's dolphin, harbour porpoise x Dall's porpoise) and between different whale species (blue whale x fin whale). Dolphin-whale hybrids are even rarer, but have been reported between bottlenose dolphin x false killer whale, and between bottlenose dolphin x pilot whale.

Geoff Hosey
Bolton, Greater Manchester

Simulacra corner



Raymond Williamson came upon this "bear" in the New Forest. Though it turned out to be a tree root, he still thought it was "clearly magical and the protector of the forest". He provided this link for bear worship: http://www.treesforlife.org.uk/forest/mythfolk/bear.html

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.

Regarding evil

The question of theodicy is easily resolved in a manner that may satisfy Martin Jenkins as well as Noel Rooney [**FT322:67**].

Mr Jenkins's logic does indeed seem impeccable – a good God ought to allow freedom and therefore the existence of evil. However, this must be placed within the broader framework of how to define a 'good God'. Arguably, a good God not only bestows freedom, but also absence of pain for the creatures he forms; but these traits cannot coexist, for if a free choice of good and evil is allowed, some of the creatures necessarily suffer. Conversely, if the creatures are prevented from suffering, there is no way in which evil can manifest. From this insoluble paradox it follows that life on Earth was not created by a 'good God'.

This leaves only three possibilities: that our understanding of 'good' is defective; that life on Earth was created by a malevolent God; or that life on Earth was not excogitated by any God, but evolved in more complex ways. The third option seems preferable. Presumably, the generations of church fathers who pondered this question were unwilling to acknowledge this for psychological reasons, not for logical ones.

Meanwhile, it would help if the definition of evil were more nuanced. For example, the evil perpetrated by conscious living beings, such as people, is different from the suffering from natural events, such as being buried under an avalanche. A truly benign God might at least have designed a world without food chains and natural hazards, leaving humans with the sole free choice of doing good or evil towards each other. The 'evil' inflicted by natural hazards does not serve the purpose of enabling freedom of choice for humans.

Marinus van der Sluijs
University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

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letters

Exploding head syndrome

We are writing in response to Roderick Williams's letter about his experience of nocturnal bangs [**FT324:75**]. His description of his experiences sounds as if he might have had what has become known as 'exploding head syndrome' (Pearce, 1989). This phenomenon was probably first described in the scientific literature by Mitchell (1876) and later by Armstrong-Jones (1920). It is now a recognised sleep disorder, according to the *International Classification of Sleep Disorders – 3rd edition* (ICSD-3), but there has not been much research or attention paid to it (Sharpless, 2014) and so relatively little is known about it. Sharpless (2014, p.1) describes it as follows: "Exploding head syndrome is characterised by the perception of abrupt, loud noises when going to sleep or waking up [hypnagogic and hypnopompic experiences respectively – Editor]. They are usually painless, but associated with fear and distress."

As the name suggests, the noise is often likened to that of an explosion and can be perceived as coming from within the head. In addition to explosive, percussive noises, other examples of reported sounds include musical 'twangs', beeps, doors slamming, and thunder and lightning. The sound of pistol or shotgun firing has also been reported (see Sharpless, 2014; Sherwood, 2012); the sound of a pistol discharge was mentioned by both Roderick Williams and his taxi driver during their experiences. In exploding head syndrome, these sounds can also sometimes be accompanied by a perceived flash of light. There is little data available concerning the prevalence of this syndrome but some have thought it to be quite rare and to occur primarily in older (i.e., 50+) individuals. However, a recent study of undergraduate students found that 18 per cent of the sample had experienced exploding head syndrome at least once (Sharpless, in press) suggesting that it can be relatively common in younger individuals.

For examples of exploding head syndrome, see p75.

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Dr Simon Sherwood
Northampton
Dr Brian Sharpless
Washington State University

Crucifixion

Regarding crucifixion [**FT326:38-41**], I read a few years ago that there is no pictorial representation from ancient times – but I don't know about written descriptions. I saw a TV programme once where it was suggested that 'normal' crucifixions were like those of St Andrew, i.e. diagonal, not upright as it has been assumed for centuries. It was backed up by practical considerations. What is the truth?

Eric Fitch
Hereford

Noel Rooney responds: There is very little in ancient literature to tell us that crucifixion, in the sense the biblical tradition has it, existed at all. Herodotus mentions the punishment as being a Persian invention, but he doesn't describe it, and the word he uses (*stauros*) could just as easily mean impalement on a stake. Seneca gives a very vague description, but it offers almost too much variety and little detail: "I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet." (*Dialogues* 6:20:3)

I don't know of any visual image of crucifixion before the early mediæval period (5th century is usually given) and then there is the Alexamenos graffito [**FT324:15**], probably 3rd century, which may be pre-dated by a seal from Gaza showing a stick figure on a cross from the late 2nd/early 3rd century. There's a famous relief carving on the door of the church of Santa Sabina in Rome, and a carved box lid from Gaul, both early 5th century.

To the extent that there are descriptions of any value from the ancient world, they suggest: a single stake; a series of (variously) two, three, or four stakes; or a tree. The whole business of the crossbeam and so on appears to come from Roman times, but no one specifically talks about them. So ultimately the Gospel account is the only ancient account of crucifixion, and it actually says very little.

It's usually assumed that the image derives either from the cross, which is a relatively early Christian symbol, or from the Chi-Ro (the 'staurogram') found in some 2nd/3rd century manuscripts, which is vaguely suggestive of a figure on a cross.

Barry Baldwin adds: Everything (and more) about this grisly subject may be found in Martin Hengel's *Crucifixion* (Fortress Press, 1977). The earliest picture seems to be a graffito (1st or 2nd century AD) from Puteoli, showing the crucifixion on a T-shaped cross of a certain Alkimila; see on this John Granger Cook, 'Crucifixion as Spectacle in Roman Campania,' (*Novum Testamentum* 54 (1), 60-100, esp. 92-98). There is an apparently unique case of a preserved victim of crucifixion, found in 1968 at Givat Hamivtar, Jerusalem, in Israel – bones preserved in a family ossuary.

Byzantine iconography starts depicting crucifixion scenes from the early 6th century; details and bibliography in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. See also the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.

Noel Rooney is right to note the often blurred distinction between simple upright pole impalement and the 'real thing'. As far as we can tell, the procedure evolved from a simple upright pole to a regular cross which might be T-shaped, X-shaped, or Y-shaped; Saint Andrew (e.g.) is traditionally said to have been executed on the X-shaped; Saint Peter (at his own request) was crucified upside down; the 'Epistle of Barnabas' implies Christ was crucified on the so-called 'crux commissa', but Augustine (drawing on Ephesians 3.18) suggests the 'crux immissa' (i.e. with the upright extending above the transom).

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY

Kate Fox's husband?

I was very interested to read in "The Cities of Lost Children" by Theo Paijmans [**FT323:33**] that a certain Henry D Jencken reported a panic in a Spanish town of Lorca in 1869 where he was attacked and nearly killed by a mob believing him to be a suspected child stealer belonging to a cult whose purpose was to butcher children and use the fat of their entrails to repair the telegraph wires.

Might this be the same Henry D Jencken who married Kate Fox, one of the famous Fox sisters of spirit rapping and "the origin of Spiritualism" fame alongside her sister Margaret? If so, it adds a further level of fortean interest to the story. To quote from *Britannica* online: "In the 1870s the sisters traveled to England, where spiritualism attracted a considerable following. Kate married Henry D. Jencken in 1872 and thereafter used the name

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Fox-Jencken. She returned to the United States in 1885."
Stephen Volk
Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire

Jim Morrison

Further to Dean Ballinger's letter about The Doors [**FT325:70**], I found a strange little book in my local Oxfam shop recently called *Mr Mojo Risin Ain't Dead*. Its author, Ron Clooney, claims to have met Jim Morrison in Athens about five years ago. Troubled by inconsistencies in his death scenario, Clooney travelled to Paris where he met a dying man styling himself Doug Prayer, who maintained he recorded with Morrison in 1971 in a band named Shasta. According to Prayer, Morrison hated being a commodity and wanted to escape. Another band member, Miguel 'Mickey' Alvarez, was enough of a lookalike to impersonate Jim as a prank, and when he died of a heroin overdose in a nightclub, Morrison and his disquieting muse Pamela Courson jumped at the opportunity to bury Alvarez as Morrison and take off for Sausalito with a $250,000 royalty cheque.

Courson herself died of an overdose in 1974. Morrison backpacked to India, worked grape-harvesting in the Dordogne, and visited Italy, Sweden and Africa, a necronaut, exploring his own posterity. Doug Prayer showed Clooney a painting of a Greek theatre inscribed on the back, in Jim's handwriting, "Let's resurrect the old Gods and dance in great golden copulations until the sea rises to reclaim us".

Morrison, as Mickey Alvarez, was making artworks for tourists in Athens in a gallery called The Ninth Life. He had white hair tied in a ponytail, and was disfigured from a serious car accident. "I've never been so free, man," he told Clooney. "Perhaps being dead gives you the ultimate freedom." After their encounter, The Ninth Life Gallery changed owners; Alvarez/Morrison left no forwarding address.

Clooney's account has attracted much scepticism. It places us between a Scylla and Charybdis of implausibility: either the other Doors have managed to keep this secret for four decades, or Morrison had hoodwinked them for the past 40 years.

Then there's the ghost photograph… In 1997, rock historian Brett Meisner took a picture of Morrison's grave in Père Lachaise cemetery, in which viewers have construed a shadowy figure in a posture of crucifixion, wearing strangely familiar dark trousers (*Ghosts Caught On Film 2* by Jim Eaton, 2009, p.26). A spectre; or a phantasm of the living?
Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Air armada

I recently purchased (from a local charity shop) the *Royal Jubilee Book* of 1935, full of photographs from the previous 25 years. This 1933 photo of the Italian Air Armada crossing the Alps looks just like a swarm of UFOs from a 1950s B-movie to me.
Lorna Stroup Nilsson, *Princetown, Devon*

Flashes of colour

I also was living in Melbourne and saw the AMPOL colour demonstration on a black and white TV as discussed by CF [**FT325:73**]. I moved back to the UK in the 1970s and no one here had ever heard of such a thing. I'd put it right to the back of my mind, almost a fortean event! I *knew* I saw it but no one believed me so it wasn't worth mentioning again. Thanks to CF I've done a little research and found a 28 October 1969 report in the Sydney *Morning Herald* online – so I would have been 12 when I witnessed this technological wonder.

Under the headline "The Box Goes Red And Blue!", the report begins: "Keep a fresh eye for the commercials next week because one of them (for Ampol) will be in colour. On your black and white TV set you will see flashes of red and blue. The process that makes this possible is called Color-Tel… [It was] invented by an American, James Butterfield, who deciphered the colour code in the electronic signals sent from the eye to the brain. It is essentially an animation process and requires no extra equipment at home or at the TV station." This 'explanation' doesn't really tell you anything.
Sue Read
St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex

I too am a child of the 1960s in Oz and vividly remember these AMPOL commercials. They were apparently withdrawn because the flickering CF mentions was causing sensitive people to have seizures.
Max Garrod
Grafton, New South Wales

As a child living in Adelaide in the 1960s, I remember the AMPOL symbol – as described by CF, but in the top right hand corner of the TV screen – change from a black and white image to the red white and blue colour logo.

The thing that has always bemused me is that, while I am certain of my recollection, and that other family members watched this with me, when I have tried to discuss it they all deny any knowledge of it happening and, in fact, insist it didn't happen at all.
CM
Melbourne

What CF saw was an example of the Fechner colour effect, also called pattern-induced flicker colours (PIFCs). Different patterns of flicker on a monochrome image induce a subjective colour response in the viewers' eyes and brain. It's not fully understood how. This is employed in a Benham disk or top.

James F Butterfield and Dr Derek H Fender invented the Color-Tel subjective colour process, or electronic colour. The camera was equipped with a "Color Translator". Another similar system was the Nagler Process.

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Script in stone?

On 11 February I was ambling along Reiss Beach in the north Highlands, near where I live, when I came across this strange-looking mudstone, about 16in [40cm] long, which appears to have symbols on it that resembled Viking runes – after all, there was a Viking burial site nearby. I contacted some local people who know about archæology and geology and they were equally puzzled. It's more than likely some geological anomaly but it's still very odd. The stone is about 380 million years old. The markings are on two opposite sides and it weighs around a stone (of course!). Geologist Robert Shand believes the markings were created by shrinkage cracks as the mud dried out and petrified, though he admits it does look very much like ancient script. Could it be in a language yet to be deciphered?

David Graham Scott
Wick, Caithness

Thre were experimental transmissions in the UK, US and Australia in the late 1960s and early 1970s – mainly advertisements, for example an Oxo ad in the UK. It was also used in the UK in an ITN newscast and BBC 2's *Tomorrow's World*. "You had to blink your eyes very quickly to see it". And I have an early memory of reading about an experimental transmission in the US on KNXT Los Angeles.

(References: "Folkscanomy Electronic Articles: Color TV–That Isn't" *Popular Electronics*, Oct 1968, p73,74,75,118. "Now – COLOR on Your Black-and White TV Set", *Popular Science*, Aug 1968, p86,87.)

Dale Johnston
Napier, New Zealand

In the late 1960s I was about 10 years old and living in Wales. In one episode of the long-running weekly science programme *Tomorrow's World* they announced they would transmit a colour image on the black and white TV. I can remember it sort of working; you had to have the brightness and contrast set just right in order to see the effect. It wasn't that good and we were told that watching it for any length of time would give you a headache.

Stuart Martinson
Rhos, Swansea

CF experienced a phenomenon called "subjective colour", which allows colour information to be transmitted using black-and-white cameras and receivers. The camera has to be modified to the extent of having a wheel of coloured filters revolving in the optical path, with just the right amount of flickering. No modification at all is needed at the receiver; the viewer's perception of colour is actually an optical illusion. The system has three major drawbacks: some people don't see the colour at all; most who do see it experience it as pale and washed-out (just as CF describes); the flickering is, to put it mildly, objectionable. For a very brief description of the process, see: http://journal.smpte.org/content/77/10/1025.short

Dale Neiburg
Laurel, Maryland

Football faux pas

Being a loyal subscriber, I rarely find cause to complain about your illustrious organ, but I'm afraid I took great offence at the description of the abominable Chelsea FC as being 'Arsenal's great north London rivals' ["The Curse of Aaron Ramsey" **FT325:54**]. As a lifelong supporter of Arsenal's *genuine* rivals, the magnificent Tottenham Hotspur, I have begrudgingly come to accept the changes in the footballing demographic brought about by the advent of the Premier League and nouveau riche clubs like CFC, but even so Rob Gandy should surely be aware that Chelsea is very much a part of *west* London.

Patrick Young
Winchester, Hampshire

In his article "The Curse of Aaron Ramsey", Rob Gandy states that actor Paul Walker "died after he lost control of his Porsche" [**FT325:55**]. Walker was actually a passenger in the vehicle, which was owned and driven by his financial advisor and business partner Roger Rodas. Investigators have calculated that Rodas was driving at speeds between 80mph and 93mph [130-150km/h] at the time.

Graham Mullins
Chislehurst, Kent

Fat Boy's farewell

Readers may be interested to hear a sad little postscript to the Fat Boy of Peckham's story [**FT325:28-35**]. Molly Lefebure, who was secretary to pathologist Keith Simpson during World War II, wrote a memoir of her experiences that was published as *Murder on the Home Front*. She describes working with Simpson on several well known murder cases but also includes her description of seeing the Fat Boy in the mortuary:

"His real name was Traddle, or Truddle or somesuch... he had a very dull face. When he was in his prime, the coroner's officer told us, he weighed almost five hundred pounds [227kg] and at school he had to have a special desk made for him. He also had a special little donkey-cart. But at the time of his death he only weighed a meagre two hundred and twenty pounds [100kg] or so. Poor man, he had TB and collapsed in the street. He was a watch-maker by trade. I felt sorry for him. What a weird life! To be a sensational Fat Boy of five hundred pounds, finally whittling away to a mere tuberculous two hundred. I always remember my grandfather laughing and talking about the Fat Boy of Peckham. Funny to think at last I've seen him – on the post mortem table! West [a mortuary officer] was highly interested in this p-m and so were all the coroner's officers. They all came in to take a look at the unhappy celebrity. Poor old Fat Boy of Peckham!"

Zoe Barkham
By email

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it happened to me...

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Nocturnal Bangs

I read with great interest Roderick Williams's letter about nocturnal bangs [**FT324:75**] as I have also experienced this phenomenon. On at least two occasions I have woken in the middle of the night with my heart pounding and senses alert, having being woken by what seems to have been a very local and very loud bang. But on both occasions there has been no evidence of an actual noise having occurred, and my wife has remained apparently undisturbed by the noise. This is unusual in itself, as I (rather than her) typically sleep through any noises or disturbances in the night. I have always assumed that these bangs were not an external phenomenon (i.e. an actual noise) but were either from an internal physiological source or purely an artefact of a sleeping brain. On a number of occasions when drifting off to sleep I have also jolted myself awake because I have had the sensation of tripping over or falling forward, which is phenomenon known as a "hypnic jerk". I have assumed that nocturnal bangs were a similar type of sleep-related phenomenon.

Paul Jackson
Wiltshire

I am a semi-insomniac who regularly wakes up in the early hours of the morning and then struggles to get back to sleep for long periods. Occasionally on really bad nights I have spent several hours awake and on some of those nights I have experienced two strange phenomena when eventually starting to doze off. The less common of these is very similar to Roderick Williams's experience. A loud report bringing me back to full wakefulness, as if someone has fired a cap gun right next to my ear. I first experienced this some years ago when trying to get to sleep one morning after working a night shift. Despite being very tired I just could not drop off, which I put down to an excessive intake of coffee during the night. Since then I've probably experience the cap gun about 10 times.

The far more common experience is a gradual crescendo of high-pitched white noise as I'm drifting off. This is experienced more as a sound filling my head rather than one heard from an external source. Just as this starts to become unbearable I have the sensation of being dragged out of bed and spun around very quickly all over the bedroom. This can go on for what feels like several minutes, but I normally force myself to wake up. On waking, I don't feel dizzy or nauseous as I might expect, just very frustrated that I'm back to square one with not being able to get to sleep.

Alan Gull
Kent

BARDSEY ISLAND: STRAY CROC

"The face came into sharp focus until I recognised it as that of a friend, complete with glasses"

I have also experienced loud bangs like those of Roderick Williams. As with him, they have happened just as I am about to fall asleep, but have not quite lost consciousness. I do not suffer from any sort of hearing impairment. As well as bangs I have also heard other noises: laughter, strange noises and even once the sound of a horn or trumpet. As I've had this experience a couple of times, I've put it down to being the start of a dream, but because I've not completely dropped off the 'sound' has startled me awake again.

Frank Ibbotson
By email

Oxygen visions

Alice Hepple's letter [**FT324:71**] has prompted me to write in about something that happened to me last year. I had been admitted to hospital with pneumonia, the treatment for which involved long periods wearing an oxygen mask to assist my breathing. During one of those periods, I began to experience rather strange phenomena. During the treatment I was obliged to remain almost immobile in bed, only able to look out of the window opposite. It was a bright, sunny afternoon with a few clouds visible, and as I looked, I began to discern recognisable shapes in the clouds. This is of course far from unusual but it had never happened to me before. Things, however, began to take a stranger turn. I 'saw' the head of a bearded man – which, as I concentrated on it, came into sharp focus until I recognised it as the face of a friend, complete with glasses. Then it became somewhat animated, turning to face me and smiled. After a few minutes it dissipated, but other well-defined objects came and went over the course of the two or three hours of treatment. When the mask was removed, everything returned to normal, but more was to follow.

The next time I wore the mask, I happened to be lying with my eyes closed, but still wide-awake and entirely aware of my surroundings. In my mind's eye I could 'see' a curtain gently waving in front of me, towards which I seemed to be drifting. As I approached, it remained in focus until I could clearly make out details of its weave, something of which I would not normally be capable without glasses. Suddenly, I passed 'through' the curtain and found myself somewhere else, a busy shopping street along which I drifted, unseen by the shoppers. All this time, I could hear the sounds of the ward, feel the bed sheets under me, and was fully aware of being in a hospital bed. As the days went on, I found that I could do this at will while wearing the mask. All I had to do was close my eyes, and a 'barrier' of some sort would appear before me. Sometimes it would be the curtain, sometimes a panelled wall, and sometimes a door. Each time I would drift to within an inch of the surface, seeing every detail in sharp focus, then 'push' through to find myself somewhere else in space and time. Curiously, when I went back to the early 20th century, I saw everything sepia-toned. Strangest of all, though, was the time I found myself on a train, watching the scenery passing the window. Within the vision I decided to turn and look back at the scenery, so I turned my head to look. Still aware of my surroundings, I could feel the pillow against my face, but could "see" the receding landscape through the train window.

During these visions, I could never choose where to go, but once there I could choose whether to turn left or right, stop or turn round. If I opened my eyes, it would all be gone and I could not get it back until the next session. The obvious explanation is that my treatment left me 'hyperoxygenated' and affected my perception, but the figures from the monitor to which I was attached during this time would tend to contradict the theory, as I was only just getting just enough oxygen to keep going. Overall, apart from the near-fatal illness, it was an extremely interesting experience, which may throw some light on other reports of visions.

Christopher Dean
By email

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STRANGE AND SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM

JAN BONDESON presents more stories from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

LEFT: The Champion Shaver, from the *IPN*, 22 Oct 1887.
BELOW: The Shaving Match at the Royal Aquarium, from the *IPN*, 12 Nov 1887.

38. TEDDY WICK, THE FASTEST BARBER IN THE WEST

Edward 'Teddy' Wick was born in Paddington in 1864, the son of a photographer with the same name. The 1881 Census finds him at 14 Dungannon Terrace, Fulham, as apprentice to the barber and hairdresser Thomas Mills. In 1884, Teddy married Miss Ellen Keith, the daughter of a labouring man, and settled down at his own barber's shop at 418 King's Road, Chelsea. He soon acquired a very good professional reputation: not only was he extremely quick with the razor, but he never cut or grazed any of his clients.

There was an old tradition among the London barbers of holding 'shaving matches' where bets were made that a champion barber would shave a certain number of people in an hour. Fred Gornall, the Lightning Barber of Liverpool, had shaved 82 men in an hour back in 1822, but his record had been beaten by Silas Corlett, the Islington Knight of the Razor, who had managed 124 shaves in an hour. In 1887, Teddy Wick made the newspaper headlines after being backed to shave 50 people in an hour for £15 a side; he managed 79 shaves in 59 minutes 53 seconds and became known as the Champion Barber of London. He was awarded a fine silver cup on which the details of this feat had been engraved.

In November 1889, 'Professor' Teddy Wick won a shaving competition at the Royal Aquarium for £100 a side, beating the Fulham barber Markey. Teddy shaved 11 men in three minutes and 30 seconds, whereas Markey had managed nine in three minutes 35 seconds. The Champion Barber introduced a novel phenomenon at his King's Road barber's shop: his little daughter Nellie, aged only four, would shave five men in 12 minutes. Both Nellie and her younger brother Walter had been instructed by their father since a very early age, and showed considerable promise with the razor, the 'Professor' told a visiting *Pall Mall Gazette* journalist.

By 1893, London had two 'Champion Barbers': Teddy Wick and W Lloyd of Fulham. They agreed to settle their differences at a grand shaving match at the Imperial Theatre of the Royal Aquarium. First, little Miss Nellie, now eight years old, shaved five men in six minutes 42 seconds. The the 'Professor' and his rival took to the stage. After a frenzied effort, Teddy had shaved 40 men and Lloyd 31; two men who had been cut were deducted from Lloyd's score, and one man who had been badly shaved from that of the 'Professor'.

Now the Undisputed Champion Barber of London, Teddy joined the ranks of the minor celebrities of the Metropolis. A short, youthful-looking, dapperly dressed cove, the Fastest Barber in the West of London missed no opportunity to give a newspaper interview. One wall in his barber's shop was covered with autographed photographs of his clients: peers, politicians, actors and magnates of every description. Teddy Wick went on to tour the music halls, showing off his skills, and once took part in a Lion Wager, shaving the lion-tamer in a cage full of lions. (For more Lion Wagers, see **FT308:76-79.**) Both men left the cage alive, but the following day, the lion-tamer was mauled to death by his beasts.

The 1901 Census finds Teddy in a barber's shop at 74 George Street, Camberwell, with a new wife named Daisy and five children from his first marriage. Nellie, who was now 16 years old, was one of his two assistants. At the time of the 1911 Census, Teddy was at 47 Euston Road, King's Cross, with his wife and a six-year-old son named Archibald. 'Professor' Teddy Wick, the Fastest Barber in the West, died in October 1938 aged 74.

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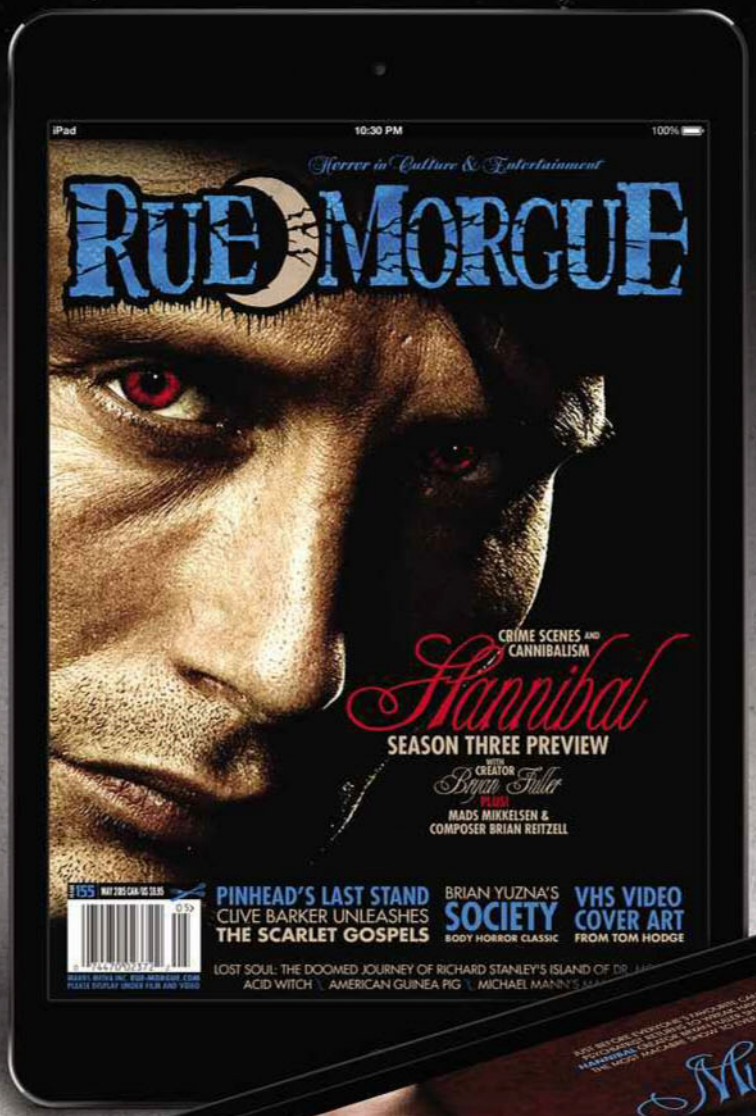

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX Dion Fortune 1

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FORTEAN TIMES 328

ON SALE 28 MAY 2015

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A young ski resort worker died on 27 February after being sucked into a snow-clearing machine. The driver of the vehicle, who was sent out to clear the roads of Les Angles resort in the Pyrenees, had problems with his machine and discovered the body when he got out to see what was wrong. The unnamed woman, in her early 20s, was "caught in the snowblower during the operation to clear the roads this morning at 5.15am," said Jérôme Meunier, the director of the resort, close to France's borders with Andorra and Spain. She may have been hit by the snowblower before being sucked into the machine, but police were also investigating if she was already lying dead in the snow before the vehicle appeared. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 28 Feb 2015.*

A woman from St Joseph, Michigan, accidentally shot herself dead on New Year's Day while adjusting her bra gun holster. Christina Bond, 55, a town councillor and former US Navy officer, was looking down the barrel of the .22-calibre revolver when she accidentally discharged the weapon and shot herself in the eye. She died in hospital. Carrie Lightfoot, the owner of the Well Armed Woman store, told *USA Today* last year that bra holsters were growing in popularity. *D.Telegraph, 20 Feb 2015.*

Biker Troy Smith, 25, was killed when a gun in his jacket went off and hit him in the chest as he cycled in St Petersburg, Florida. *D.Mirror, 14 Mar 2015*.

A Cambodian man was beaten and stoned to death by a mob of about 600 people who accused him of sorcery. Traditional healer Pov Sovann, 36, was beaten for around six hours after being accused of killing several elderly people though witchcraft. Bati district police chief Khut Lo said: "My police could not do anything because there were many people who carried stones and clubs and were very violent." *MX News (Sydney), 30 April 2014.*

An indigenous woman was killed in Paraguay after being accused of witchcraft. Members of the Mbya Guarani community tied Adolfina Ocampos, 45, to a wooden pole and shot arrows at her before they burned her alive. Nine men in Tahehyi, a village some 180 miles (290km) north of the capital, Asuncion, were charged with first-degree murder. *Western Mail, 6 Nov 2014*.

Miguel Martinez, 14, was playing hide-and-seek with friends at the National Ranching Heritage Museum, situated on the Texas Tech University campus, when he ran into a bull statue and fatally impaled himself on one of its horns sometime before dawn on 22 June 2013. *[AP] 25 June 2013.*

Jennifer Carren, a 35-year-old Canadian from Calgary, was on a snorkelling trip with 23 other tourists in the Sea of Cortez, returning to the port of Cabo San Lucas on the southern tip of Baja California, Mexico, on 11 March. Around noon and about 2km (1.2 miles) from land, a grey whale slammed into the small boat, tossing Ms Carren into the sea. She was given CPR on deck, but died later in hospital. Grey whales, which weigh up to 36 tons, are native to the waters. Accidents are rare. Two years ago, a US yacht sank after a breaching whale fell on it. *[AP] 11 Mar; Sun, 13 Mar; D.Express, 14 Mar 2015.*

Dimitrina Dimitrova, 29, jumped up and down in excitement when he boyfriend proposed marriage on 27 January, then lost her footing and fell 65ft (20m) to her death. The couple, from Bulgaria, were in the tiny resort of Cala Tarida on Ibiza's west coast – famed for its sunset views. Ms Dimitrova, 29, suffered a heart attack from her injuries and died minutes after paramedics arrived. Her boyfriend lived and worked as a waiter in Cala Tarida and she had arrived two days earlier to look for work. Last August a Polish couple fell to their deaths while taking a selfie at a cliff's edge in Cabo da Roca, Portugal. Their children, aged five and six, were taken into care before going home to live with relatives. *D.Mail, Metro, 30 Jan 2015.*

Evgenia Sviridenko, 24, died after dropping her iPhone into the bath with her while it was plugged in and being charged. She was looking at her page on VKontakte (the Russian version of Facebook) when the accident happened, according to her Moscow flatmate, Yaroslav Dubinina, 23. "I noticed that she had been gone a while, and when I couldn't raise her I opened the door and saw her floating on the water looking really pale. I saw her phone which was on the charger was at the bottom of the bath, and I unplugged it and pulled her out. Her body was still shaking from the shock."

Police were investigating why the phone charger didn't cut out and would not reveal whether it was a licensed Apple product or not. The iPhone 4 was still working after falling in the water because Ms Sviridenko had apparently managed to dial the emergency services. Only a few days earlier, a 16-year-old girl died in Russia's Bashkortostan Republic after taking her charging phone into the bathroom as she showered. *Metro, D.Express, 13 Feb 2015.*

Grant Adams, 17, died after falling into a sunbed and severing his jugular vein on one of its glass tubes. He tripped on a shoe as he got out of bed and pierced his neck in two places. The trainee bricklayer, of South Shields, died at Newcastle Royal Infirmary. He pulled the tube out of his neck after the fall and suffered massive blood loss. His girlfriend was seven months pregnant with his child. *Metro, 11 June 2014.*

THE FORTEAN TIMES BOOK OF STRANGE DEATHS VOL 2

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